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THE
HAZELHURST MYSTERY.

THE
HAZELHURST MYSTERY.

A Novel.

BY
JESSIE SALE LLOYD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE HAZELHURST MYSTERY.

CHAPTER I.

TO BE, OR NOT TO BE?

KATE KERLEY sat with an open letter in her hand. She had read it through dispassionately — no tremor could have been seen upon her lips — no deeper shade upon her cheek — no softening in her dark eyes — yet she had just received her first offer of marriage, and was debating whether she should or should not accept it.

George Grafton had written her an open, manly letter, telling her of his love, and

asking her to become his wife. She did not care for him one bit—of that she was quite aware, but the question was, how she should get the most enjoyment out of her life—as a poor single woman, or a rich married one?

Kate had been left an orphan, at an age when girls most require a mother's guidance. A railway accident had deprived her of both her parents at once, and she was left to the tender mercies of a serious maiden great-aunt.

She was then but a tall girl of fifteen years old, with large wistful brown eyes, and nothing else particular to distinguish her, except the unusually firm expression of her mouth and square cut chin, which made you feel the child would be powerful hereafter for good or evil.

Miss Maria Ansell (Kate's great-aunt)

was a good woman in her way, but totally wanting in the milk of human kindness. She had lived hard as a poor gentlewoman, had the very narrowest experience and views of life, but a keen sense of duty. Duty governed her existence—to duty, everything must be sacrificed—yes, even *she* herself! Difficult as she found it to make ends meet, and much as she disliked children, she must adopt her niece's daughter—the girl had no one else in the world, and it was "*her duty*"—and Miss Ansell sat more upright than ever with the conscious pride of having put away temptation—the temptation of closing the doors of her cottage against Kate Kerley. Such a new element within its walls, Miss Ansell knew full well, would put her life out of time; and with a grim smile she determined to keep a "strict hand" over the girl.

She had not forgotten how her niece had “disgraced” herself by running away with a penniless man, and why, forsooth? because she loved him!

Loved him, indeed!—no respectable girl would give such a reason for “misconduct” so gross!

She really could not think what had come to the young women of the present day—they were ready to throw themselves at the head of the first man who asked them—and were always lounging about in attitudes that no modest girls would have adopted when she was young. Well she remembered going to see her niece after her marriage—it was her first and only visit.

She found her sitting before the fire in an easy chair, and her husband beside her in another smoking! and she had—yes!

actually she had her feet on the fender with her dress up in front several inches, showing her feet and ankles, with her husband in the room ! And Miss Ansell shuddered in her maiden propriety as she remembered the indelicate scene, and how bold her niece had been over it—not seeming one bit ashamed. Miss Ansell had known too well what was due to herself ever to visit such a house again ; but now that judgment had overtaken the offender, and the participator in her guilt, she felt it to be her Christian duty to offer a harbour of refuge to the child of her erring niece.

But, if she found she had inherited the evil of her mother's nature, she must put it down at once with example and discipline.

Kate Kerley had had a happy home

during the early years of her life. Her parents had presumed to love and to marry regardless of Aunt Ansell and all other opposing elements. So hardened were they in their iniquity that the hour of repentance never came to them.

Mr. Kerley had worked hard as a City clerk, had generally managed to pay his way, but had found it impossible to save ; and they had died together. Had they lived, it would have been to learn of the smash of the house of business in which the husband was employed, and a City panic such as had not been known for fifty years. They might all have lived on three straws a day, and died a lingering death, and sunk, God knows how low ; but, as Miss Ansell said, and believed speedy judgment overtook them, and there was only one little waif and stray left to starve

alone, and for her "Providence" had provided a refuge in the heart and home of her great-aunt, Miss Maria Ansell—a pious Christian, and enlightened woman !

Kate Kerley sat watching at the window for the return of her parents, looking with wistful eyes down the street. Anything might have been made of that child. They were the only beings on earth who loved her, and whom she loved, and her face was lit up with an eagerness and softness that made her look beautiful. How many long years it will be before any one calls her beautiful again, however handsome they may think her ! The child had a fire burning brightly in the grate, the kettle singing cheerily on the hob. Some crickets hopped about with their merry chirp. Everything within the room was neat and home-like, although it was only a London lodging at

a guinea a week! The red curtains reflected the leaping flames and cast a glow of warmth around. The tea-things had been spread on a neat white cloth by the loving little hands, and when everything was done, she seated herself at the window to watch.

It was a long vigil. At first she took an interest in the passers-by, but, as the evening wore on and darkness drew in, she grew anxious, and at nine o'clock the landlady entered and seated herself without a word of permission.

“Well, Miss Kerley, this is a queer piece of work. What’s become of your pa and ma?”

Kate, who had been too much absorbed to notice her entrance, here turned upon her two large frightened eyes—

“What do you want, Mrs. Smart?”

“Lor’ bless the child, they’ve missed their train. You needn’t take on like that. Your ma said they was a going into the country somewheres.” And, casting an approving eye around the room to note its neatness, Mrs. Smart discovered that Katey had had no tea—nothing since her dinner at one o’clock—and exclaimed, “Why, Miss Kerley, no wonder you look like a ghost! Not one bit have you put between your lips since middle day, nor yet one drop neither, I’ll warrant. And, bless the child! if you haven’t let the kettle boil dry and burn its bottom out! Oh! how careless gals is. Well, it ain’t no concern of mine—your pa will have to pay for it, in course—but I’d have you more careful in future, in cause you see he’s backward with his rent, which shows he ain’t in a thriving condition.”

Kate's face flushed an angry red. "Say nothing against my father, Mrs. Smart," she cried, with an ominous tremble in her voice.

"Well, you've a temper of your own, Miss Kerley, certingly! but you're not over wise to quarrel with your best friend, with five pounds owing for rent, and you deserted, as one might say, by your parents, for the Lord only knows whether they will come back or not!"

A trembling seized upon Katey's limbs. Her parents not come back—her parents desert her! It was with passion she trembled, and she turned her face, now set and pale, towards the landlady.

"Go! leave the room!" she cried, with a gesture of command that Mrs. Smart, middle-aged woman though she was, felt bound to obey in silence; but when alone, she gave way to her indignation.

“To be ordered about by a young minx like that! in one’s own house, too! Well, to be sure, things were come to a queer time of day! If Mr. Kerley couldn’t pay his rent, why, she would turn him out, bag and baggage! Oh dear! what a world it was, when honest folks was to be cheated under their own roofs, and then be ordered about by a brat of fifteen!”

And Mrs. Smart sat down to supper, and partook heartily of the sirloin of beef which Mr. and Mrs. Kerley had had for dinner the day before; and handed a dry crust of bread and a glass of water to the small servant-of-all-work, who had never had food enough in her miserable life to grow upon.

“There, girl, have your supper; and be quick, for them Kerleys may come home any time. I wonder what they’re up to, that they should be out at this hour of the

night, when all respectable folks is at their suppers or family prayers afore they goes to their lawful beds! But there's no being up to the ill ways of some people, and they'll have to walk if there's any more of these doings. Ten o'clock, and them not home, and all the things to clear away and wash up!"

The Kerleys had been the solitary bright spot in the life of this hard-worked drudge—they had treated her as a human being, and she had improved in her own estimate of herself under their kind words. Make a man or a woman feel utterly lost and worthless, and what pleasure has he or she, what heart, to become anything else? None whatever; but will drift on with indifference to the fact of their own depravity. On the other hand, teach a person that he is capable of good; that, like others, he has

personal responsibility and a soul to be saved, and he will long to become something higher, better. The motto of every human heart, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, is "Excelsior," though it may become deadened by sin to the knowledge; as a man may become drunk, who yet has a mind, and while drunk cannot feel the degradation of his position.

To this poor little undersized drudge Mrs. Kerley's oft-spoken words of kindness were the first breaks in the dark clouds—the first blue patches in the sky; and she began to see there was something better in life than hard words, cross looks, the pocketing of stray pennies, telling lies to shield herself, and making the eatables pay toll on the road. Susan would not now have shared that sirloin with Mrs. Smart even if she had been invited to do so; and when

she heard of the possibility of the Kerleys being made to walk, she felt as she had never felt before.

Brought up in the workhouse, Susan had been sent to service when a mere child—had been beaten, scolded, starved—hardened—it was years since she had cried, but human sympathy had at last come to her; and if she was dry-eyed, there were tears in her voice and a lump in her throat as she pleaded for the lodgers with her mistress.

“Oh, please mum, don’t go for to turn them out, they *is* so kind to me.”

It was not an argument in their favour to Mrs. Smart, but it was the strongest one on earth to the poor girl; and now the real tears began to flow, and Susan had a “good cry,” which gave her relief, though it got her a scolding from her mistress.

“Bless the fool!” cried Mrs. Smart. “What have you to howl about, I should like to know. Haven’t you got a good place, a good missus, and good victuals? What more can any gal want, I should like to know! Lor’! there’s a ring at the bell. Mr. and Mrs. Kerley at this hour of the night, I’ll warrant. I only hope they’re sober! but they needn’t ring the house down, they needn’t.”

Susan presently ran back into the room with an orange-coloured envelope in her hand, with a pale frightened face.

“Oh! missus, here’s the telegraph come by a boy! something’s ’appened, I know it has.”

How many wiser people feel sick at heart at the sight of a telegraph-boy entering their gates—have had cause to feel so from past sorrowful experience. Can they not

understand the feelings of this girl who had never handled one of these mysterious messages before—to her doubly mysterious and inexplicable — something “uncanny,” in fact. She knew the message ran ever so quick all along the wires—from ever so far off—all in a minute; but whether it was delivered at their end (written on pink paper and enclosed in a yellow envelope) by one of the posts to the boy who brought it round, was still a puzzle to her, and the whole affair a terror. She watched with trembling, nervously clasping hands while Mrs. Smart read the message aloud.

“To Mrs. Smart, 161, Staples Terrace. From the Station Master, Worham.—Terrible accident. Gentleman and lady killed. Supposed to be Mr. and Mrs. Kerley from letters in their pockets bearing your name

and address. Please communicate with relations."

"Well now," exclaimed Mrs. Smart, "this is sad! and they owe me five pounds—dear, dear, dear!" and she raised her fat hands with a deploring gesture and, lifted her eyes to heaven. "Dear, dear, dear! only to think of the judgments that do fall on some people—it is just like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, a story as I'm very fond of, Susan."

Susan in the meantime had heard the news in a stupor. Her small mind required a long time to take in facts, and though she had heard the fatal words, they had not yet made themselves clear to her understanding.

"When are Mr. and Mrs. Kerley coming back, mum?" she asked.

"Why, never! Bless the gal! Do you

think I'd 'ave two mangled corpses brought here? Who do you think would ever take the apartments after such a horrible tragedy had took place in them?"

It was dawning on Susan now.

"Is Mr. and Mrs. Kerley the mangled corpses, mum? Oh, poor Miss Kate, poor Miss Kate! what will become of her?"

Mrs. Smart was not of a forgiving disposition, and Kate had ordered her out of the room.

"Pride always comes before a fall," she said, solemnly; "Miss Kerley's has overtook her! What will become of her? What's that to me? This is Toosday—her week's up on Saturday, then she'll go."

"But where mum?" asked Susan.

"Drat the gal! What a fool you are, how should I know? There'll be things

enough to sell to pay the rent, and whatever's left of course she'll 'ave. If she's got any friends (which I doubt) she'll go to them, or she'll go to the union, or anywhere, it don't matter to me, then perhaps she'll learn not to turn honest folks out of their own room!" and Mrs. Smart arose in her righteous indignation to go and break the news to the poor orphan who was watching with weary, aching eyes for the parents she should never see again in life.

Susan followed her mistress, and ventured to detain her by taking hold of her ample skirt. "Missus," she whispered, "tell it gentle, for the love of God!"

And Mrs. Smart ascended on her mission of mercy! What should Susan know of God? Not much, certainly, but a few blessed words which Mrs. Kerley had told

her—the most precious to her being, “God is love !” For His sake the girl pleaded with this woman for the child of her who had taught her this precious truth.

But the words meant nothing to Mrs. Smart ; she had been a Christian woman all her life, and had no particular weakness for any especial texts like poor ignorant Susan, unless it might be a pleasure at hearing of the judgments that fell upon some who thought themselves better than their neighbours.

“Tut, tut,” she cried, “who’s been putting such talk into your head, gal, I should like to know ? The love of God, indeed ! a great deal the likes of you should know about it.” And she roughly shook off the detaining hand.

Susan’s heart misgave her as she watched the hard face go by and listened to the heavy determined tread of the landlady, and

after a few moments' hesitation she followed stealthily.

Mrs. Kerley had told her it was wrong to listen at doors, and she had given it up, although it had been the chief amusement of her life—the one romance of her existence! But now surely God would know her motive, and forgive her! and she crept close to the partly closed door, and watched through the crack.

“Miss Kerley,” said the harsh voice she knew so well—“Miss Kerley, here's a telegram to say that your Pa and Ma has met with a railway accident.”

Kate turned quickly, impatiently, upon finding Mrs. Smart in the room again, but when she had listened for a moment she became deadly pale.

“Where, where are they?” she gasped, supporting herself against the back of a chair on which she leaned heavily.

“At Worham Station I suppose, that’s where the telegram’s come from.”

“I must go to them at once,” cried the girl, “I will hire an invalid carriage, and bring them home.”

“You must not bring them here, Miss Kerley, I’ll have no mangled corpses in my house I can assure you, and as for an invalid carriage why it wont make much difference to them now whether the springs are easy or whether there’s none at all; and if you’ll take my advice you’ll take care of your money and settle your debts, and pay for the funeral honest, instead of running about the country.”

While she spoke heavy rings seemed to gather round Kate’s eyes, and she looked at the woman with horror. She became livid, and her teeth were firmly set.

“Give me the telegram,” she said calmly,

in so altered a voice that it was not to be recognised for her own.

“You bear it well, I must say, Miss Kerley,” said the landlady, handing her the paper.

Kate read it through silently, the only visible change in her face being the hardening lines about her mouth, and then she turned her eyes upon the other.

“Did I understand you rightly, that you refuse to allow my parents to be brought here?”

“You must not be offended, Miss Kerley, but it would ruin the apartments; for if once lodgings gets a bad name they’ll never let, I assure you. I don’t know how you’re left as regards money matters, but I can tell you that your Pa is in debt five pounds to me, so things couldn’t have been very prosperous with him.”

If Kate Kerley had been twenty instead of fifteen, and had known herself to be the possessor of a thousand a-year, she could not have shown better command of herself, or more dignity.

“You shall be paid, Mrs. Smart; when is my time up with you?”

“Whenever you please, Miss,” answered the woman, who would have bullied the child had she given way, but shrunk like a coward under her scornful glance. “Whenever you please, Miss, but the rooms was took on a Saturday.”

“Then on Saturday I will leave,” answered Kate.

Mrs. Smart hesitated. She wanted to say she must have a week’s notice or a week’s rent, but she turned coward beneath the gaze with which Miss Kerley was regarding her.

“Have you anything more to say, Mrs. Smart?”

“No, Miss.”

“Then go!” and this time the girl’s attitude was still more commanding, the tone of her voice more coldly imperious, and Mrs. Smart slunk away, but with revenge in her heart.

“You wait, Miss Kerley, and see if I don’t make you pay for this. I didn’t say anything about the week’s rent, but you shall pay it, I can tell you.”

When Kate had watched her enemy off the field, she sank down on the floor by the fire—by the fire which with loving thoughts she had kept bright for the dear parents who would never now come back to her. They were dead; how she wished that she were dead also, instead of being alone in the world. Do you, reader, realise what

she felt? Have you ever found yourself *alone*?—your life one large desolation? If so, you can pity Kate Kerley as she sat with firm-set face and haggard eyes, gazing apparently at the fire, in reality at nothing. The worst of all forms of grief is silent, tearless grief. Tears bring soft thoughts to the mourner, but this cruel form of sorrow brings nothing but intense agony to mind and body, and tempts the sufferer to be very wicked indeed.

Bitterest feelings filled the heart of Kate Kerley. She had expended all the love of her strong nature upon her father and mother. There was not another being in the world she cared ever to see again; and now her parents were dead—cruelly killed in the prime of life—God had taken them from her—and she would never, never love Him again, never believe Him to be “a

God of love," but as cruel, cruel, as He was powerful; and she clasped her hands in defiance and rebellion against her Maker till the nails cut into the delicate flesh of the London-reared girl, who had never ran about in the sun and tanned them, or grimed them making "dirt pies," or working in her own small garden. As she sat, Susan crept into the room and knelt beside her.

"Oh! Miss Kate, I am so sorry. I loved them both as well as you, and they were the first as ever give me a kind word; and oh! Miss Kate, your dear Ma used to tell me such lovely things about God. She told me never to forget that He loved me, and I never have forgot it," and Susan's honest tears fell thick and fast.

"He does not love *me*, at any rate," cried Kate.

Susan looked at her. "Miss Kate, if you could only think of them, poor dears, and cry a bit, it would do you a world of good."

Kate shook her head. "I shall never cry again, Susan; I feel as if I had turned to stone. You mean kindly by coming to me, but let me be alone, I had rather be alone."

Poor little Susan, chilled and repulsed, crept away, and with her went the only love, the only sympathy likely, as she thought, to cross the girl's path for many a weary day. Kate never attempted to go to bed, but sat where Susan had left her, looking at the blackened ruin in the grate without the faintest interest—a good representation of the life, hope, and happiness that had been so bright such a short time since. The lights grew dim, flickered, died out, and she continued to gaze on through

the darkness, hour after hour, till the day dawned—till the sun rose and shone mockingly into the window with the blind still drawn up, as when she watched the night before for her parents to come home. Susan entered the room, and Kate started, and asked her the time.

“Eight o’clock.”

It was time for her to go. Did Susan know where the station was for her to go to Worham. Susan, of course, didn’t know at all, but would ask Mrs. Smart; upon which Kate’s eyes shot forth a dangerous light, and she forbade the girl to do so. She could find out for herself, and she did; made all needful inquiries, and sold a gold locket and bought a ticket to Worham with the money, and went straight to the station-master with the telegram in her hand—her face deadly pale. The loving expression of her

eyes, which had been her greatest beauty, had changed to one painful to behold, especially in a girl so young. It told of agony, hatred, defiance, impotent fury—like a wounded animal brought to bay, a dangerous sort of animal too !

The station-master was kind to her, and told her the bodies of her father and mother were at the “Grey Horse,” and the inquest would be held that day. But he thought the best thing she could do was to go and see Dr. Grafton, who had attended to all those injured in the accident, and had examined the bodies of her parents.

So Kate walked to the doctor’s house and found him at home. He was going to the inquest, and she wanted to accompany him, but he would not hear of it. She passionately told him she would see the loved faces again, and he promised she should do

so. He had sons and daughters of his own, and looked upon the poor girl with affectionate sympathy and compassion.

“Miss Kerley,” he said, taking her hand in his, “will it pain you to talk to me and tell me where your nearest relations live, that I may communicate with them?”

“I have no relations, Dr. Grafton, and no friends,” she answered, bitterly; “I must fight my own way as my parents did before me.”

“But, my dear young lady, you are too young, and too handsome to be alone in the world.”

“Not at all,” interrupted Kate; “if you could recommend me to any one as a nursery governess, I should thank you. If not, I will serve in a shop.”

“But surely, Miss Kerley, your parents had friends who would be only too glad to receive you?”

“Dr. Grafton, my parents had not a friend in the world. They were poor, and committed the crime of marrying for love ! Who, after such a fault would stand by them, do you think ?—not their relations, certainly. No ; I have no friends, Dr. Grafton,” said Kate, bitterly. “I cannot expect to be treated better by the world than my parents were before me.”

“Miss Kerley,” said the good old doctor, “I have a daughter about your age, and I should consider it ruin for her to be cast adrift on the world now. Forgive me, my dear child, but for her sake I must be your friend. I have a large household ; one more or less can make no difference. You must remain here.”

Tears stood in Kate’s eyes as she answered him, “You are more than kind Dr. Grafton, but it’s impossible ; you are a

stranger to me, and I could not be a burthen on any one. Indeed, indeed, I appreciate your kindness, though I cannot accept it," and she held out a death-cold hand to the man who wished to shield her from the world.

"If you will excuse me a minute ; I shall not be long," said the doctor, and he left the room, returning soon after with a sweet motherly-looking, white-haired woman, who went over at once to Kate, and kissed her.

"Miss Kerley, or shall I call you Kate, dear? my husband has told me all about it, and I cannot let you leave us to-day. No, don't make objections, unless there is any one else you would rather go to."

"I have no one else," said Kate, humbly. "Thank you for calling me Kate ; I will stay to-day, please !"

And she did stay that day, and many other days too. Dr. and Mrs. Grafton soon

learnt the story of her life from her, such as there was to tell; and the former went up to London and paid Mrs. Smart out of his own pocket, and brought down to Kate all the things that had belonged to her parents, so that she had no further pain or trouble in the matter. Mrs. Grafton went with her when she looked her last upon the dear dead faces, grieving for the tearless, yet passionate agony of the girl whom she had taken into her kindly heart, and would fain have seen grieve as the child she was; then Mrs. Grafton took her by the hand and led her back to her own home, and she obeyed like one in a dream. She did whatever she was told to do, was perfectly tractable, put on the mourning prepared for her, attended the funeral, and continued perfectly listless, looking with her large earnest eyes into vacancy,

doubtless picturing the world into which those dear to her had passed, probably longing to be with them.

A few days after the announcement of the accident in the papers, the rector of the parish received a letter from Miss Ansell, begging for all particulars concerning the death of Mr. and Mrs. Kerley, stating that the latter was her niece. He wrote at once and told her all that he knew upon the subject, including the arrival of Kate at Worham, and her whereabouts. Upon which Miss Ansell of the flesh held a sharp conflict with her second self, who knew it to be her duty to offer a home to the orphan girl. Duty, as it always did with the good woman, got the upper hand, the flesh was ignominiously defeated, and Miss Ansell having overcome and slain temptation, sat on the extreme edge of her

chair as upright as a poplar for the rest of the day, her nose turned heavenwards, her eyes fixed far above the erring mortals of this world who succumbed to temptation. How she thanked God she was not as others! Can there be a doubt that He accepted her gratitude? Certainly not. Miss Ansell, having decided to do her duty, wrote at once to Dr. Grafton, saying she would be ready to receive her great-niece the following week.

Dr. and Mrs. Grafton felt sorry that a relation had turned up to claim Kate, as they thought she had more chance of forgetting her sorrow among young people than living alone with an old maiden grand-aunt, but Dr. Grafton made up his mind to pay Miss Ansell a visit, and went accordingly.

She was more on the edge of her chair

than ever! She must have been fresh starched and ironed for the occasion, and well iced. The room was prim to a painful extent, the bell-pull cords were in holland covers, also the tassels of the window-blinds, the music-stool—the legs of the old-fashioned piano had on long holland trousers! Miss Ansell would not allow such a demonstrative thing as a piano to remain in her room with naked legs! No! Not for the world. She, a Christian woman, knew what was due to herself and to decency, and so the well-grown instrument, six feet high at least, was taught decorum! The seats of all the chairs were covered with holland, and the arms, a holland crumb-cloth was stretched over the carpet; the curtains, the carpet, the table-cloth, all were drab! Miss Ansell looked upon colours as of the world, worldly, and not fit for

the use of a godly woman, so her cottage was innocent of such incentives to vanity and other evils. "Jeremy Taylor," "Daily Steps Heavenward," "How to Live," "The Lake of Fire," "The Judgments of Sinners," and a few other choice books in the same style, were laid ostentatiously upon the drab table-cloth, and a heap of tracts upon a side-table, the top one bearing the enticing title of "The Shortest Road to Hell!"

Dr. Grafton took in these details one by one, and dreaded the effect of such surroundings upon the high-spirited, overwrought girl. Gentle treatment, cheerful society, and love might bring her round; what chance was there of any of the three here? He looked at the hard face and felt sure that there would be but little love, but little happiness for poor Kate in her new

life. Gladly would he keep her if he could but arrange it with this only relation of poor Katie's.

"Dr. Grafton, I presume," and Miss Ansell rose up like a lamp-post, as tall, or nearly so, and almost as thin, as if she had been suddenly straightened by machinery.

The doctor, who was a small man, looked up at her with awe, and fell to wondering how a human body could be so totally without "ins and outs!" The semaphore raised an arm towards a chair some yards off, and he meekly seated himself. Miss Ansell continued in a sepulchral voice—

"You have come from Worham, I presume?"

"Yes, madam, I have."

"On the subject of my letter?"

"On the subject of your letter."

"You have, of course, informed Miss

Kerley, my great-niece, that the Lord has raised up a friend for her in her affliction, even though her parents had gone astray?"

"Madam," interrupted the little doctor, "we must deal lightly with the dead; and if I am rightly informed, their error was their greatest blessing. Am I right, madam, in believing that their only sin against the world was loving and being poor?"

Miss Ansell looked him down with her cold grey eyes.

"You look at it like a worldling, sir—I from the standpoint of *duty*. Mr. Kerley's parents objected to the match, my brother and his wife objected to the match, and *I* objected to it and to him. After that they chose the downward path of disobedience, and they were married."

"Was there anything against Mr. Kerley?" asked Dr. Grafton.

“Yes, he was poor, and a City clerk—the son of a *country doctor*!” added the old lady, spitefully.

“Dear, dear, I must have known little Katie’s grandfather then when I was a boy!” and the good man smiled at the thrust Miss Ansell had made at his dignity.

“Madam,” he continued, “the sins you speak of are in my sight virtues: but if you fear any taint may have descended upon the daughter of such parents, I can only say I love the girl, let her live with me.”

Miss Ansell started as if she had been shot.

“Sir, the impropriety of such a suggestion; I really—really——”

He looked at her gravely, even sternly.

“The nicest people must have the nastiest ideas, Miss Ansell, if they can find the smallest impropriety in my suggestion.

Mrs. Grafton and my six children have received and will gladly retain Miss Kerley as one of ourselves," and the little doctor looked almost as dignified as Miss Ansell herself.

"You mean well, sir, I have no doubt, but I hold to my opinion that there would be impropriety in Kate Kerley's living under the roof of any man who is not a *blood relation*, and as I am her nearest living relative, I shall not permit it. I hope I know my duty, Dr. Grafton."

"And you consider that to be?" he inquired.

"To take up the cross that has been sent to me, and receive my great-niece."

The doctor sat silent for some time, and then said—

"Kate is a very high-spirited girl, much older than her age, with a large capacity

for loving or hating. I should say you might lead her, Miss Ansell, but you will never drive her."

"I have not the least doubt, sir, that I shall be able to manage a girl of fifteen—that must now be her age. Rest assured she won't try rebellion twice in my house. I will do my duty by her, you may be certain."

Dr. Grafton rose with an impatient sigh.

"When do you require Miss Kerley's presence here, madam?"

"I mentioned next week in my letter."

"Yes, to be sure, but Kate really is not fit to travel at present."

"Well, sir, you can write and inform me when she is, and when I may expect her. There are some tracts, Dr. Grafton, will you take one?"

"Thank you, no, madam; I have not any

wish to learn a short cut to the lower regions; I remark the title!" and Dr. Grafton got himself safely out of the room without stopping to see the effect of his parting shot.

During Kate's stay at the Graftons, their eldest son, George, came from Ceylon. Having amassed a large fortune in the growth of coffee, he had returned home the happy possessor of forty thousand pounds, and fell straight away in love with the dark-eyed, grief-stricken young girl. George Grafton was of middle height, had about average talents, was moderately good-looking, had a manly square-shouldered figure, and hands that looked as if they had dared to work themselves even under a Ceylon sun; but one thing George had far above the common average, and that was his *heart*. He was as honest and true a man as ever

walked the earth. If that could gain a girl's love, George's domestic life should have run smoothly; but if outward graces are the things that chain a girl's affections, then George Grafton had but a poor chance of Kate Kerley's love.

George blurted straight out from his honest heart to his father and mother the state of his feelings, and they heard him with mingled pleasure, sorrow, and amusement.

What parents can be glad to know that they are no longer first in the affections of a child they have reared with such love and care? Yet glad they felt that he should be happy, glad that poor forlorn Kate should have a protector in perspective. Of course she would love him! Who could resist such a fine fellow as George? The girl who got him for a husband would be fortunate indeed!

So thought Dr. and Mrs. Grafton of their first-born. But to him they spoke differently. They said they would be very pleased to have Kate Kerley as a daughter, but she was far too young at present for George to speak of love to. He might think of her as much as he pleased, but for three years he must hold his peace. Katie was not at all likely to find any other lover at her Aunt Maria's, so he might make himself quite happy about her.

And Katie bid good-by to the friends who had been so kind to her in her trouble, and went to Northley to her new home. Miss Ansell and she had not met before, and the girl's heart sank as she crossed the room; the good books still lay on the table, the tracts on the side-table, the top one pointing out the short cut to Hades as before, and Kate gave an involuntary

shudder as she read the title, and thought life with her great-aunt must be the very shortest road there !

When she turned her head from the tracts, she saw her aunt had risen. The semaphore's arm was uplifted, and Kate was shaking hands with a skeleton, she thought. Everything superfluous Miss Ansell reckoned a sin, so she did with as little food as possible, and with as little flesh. She looked upon lovely women and rounded figures as the worst of all the deadly sins, traps to catch souls ! baits to tempt the weak and foolish to perdition !

She turned Kate to the light, and examined her face. "One comfort is, you are not good-looking, Katherine."

Katherine ! She had been called Kate or Katie all her life, and the formality struck with an extra chill on her ear, and yet she

felt almost glad that the name so often pronounced in loving tones by her mother's gentle voice should not be spoken by that harsh and cruel one.

"You are too late for lunch, so I hope you are not hungry," remarked Miss Ansell. "I dine at five o'clock!"

Kate had breakfasted at eight, and was blessed with a hearty appetite, and when she entered the house was very hungry indeed, but now she felt she did not care to eat: the hot, shut-up, close room, after the fresh March air, stifled her, and her heart had turned sick at the prospect of her future life.

"I—I am not hungry, thank you, aunt—Miss——If you please, what am I to call you?"

"My name is Miss Ansell, Katherine."

"Yes! I know; but I thought as you

were mamma's aunt, I ought to call you *aunt*."

"I object to familiarity, Katherine."

"I understand you, Miss Ansell—you have received me out of charity," she cried, with flashing eyes, "not from love for my mother, as I supposed."

"I received you, Katherine Kerley," said Miss Ansell, sternly, "because it was my *duty*—solely."

Kate's teeth clenched very tight, her eyes glittered with a dangerous light, "Had I known this before, Miss Ansell, I would have begged my bread before I would have burthened you with my presence—I hate you already!"

"Have you read 'Jeremy Taylor'?" inquired Miss Ansell.

"No."

"I thought not," she continued, "you

must do so : you will not find such language in ‘Jeremy Taylor,’ I can assure you ; I was prepared to find you a trouble, Katherine, after the way you must have been brought up, with such examples always before your eyes as my niece and her husband.”

“Be silent,” screamed Kate, her voice trembling with passion. “Do you learn from ‘Jeremy Taylor’ to slander the dead? If so, it is a wicked, wicked book, and I wont read it. Say what you like to me, Miss Ansell, do what you like to me, I can bear it ; but never attempt to speak against my parents in my presence, or I shall be tempted to——”

“Pray proceed, Miss Kerley !—if I choose in my own house to use my own tongue to express my own opinion upon my own niece, what will Miss Katherine Kerley be tempted to do ?”

“To kill you!” replied Kate, in a tone of suppressed passion, her whole face distorted.

“Houghty toighty!” exclaimed Miss Ansell; “who taught you tragedy, Miss Kerley? or have you been reading ‘Bow Bells?’ We shall soon understand each other better, I have no doubt; I will answer for it in a month you will not dare to address me as you have just done. I cannot overlook it, but your punishment shall be light this time.” She rose and took up the top tract, “Go to your room and read this through, and don’t come down again until I send for you.”

At the word punishment, Kate’s eyes had emitted a light—she was to be punished for standing up for her dead mother! She took the tract from Miss Ansell’s hand, and looked at the title, and then said, “A month with you will take me straight to the Gate,

you may be sure, by the shortest route," for which she received the soundest box on the ears that she had ever felt, and was taken by the shoulders and pushed outside the door.

"War to the knife!" cried Kate, walking straight to the small room which the servant had shown her as appointed for her use upon her arrival. She sat down by the window and looked out—there was nothing to be seen to cheer her—a kitchen garden hemmed in by a very high wall, nothing else. Yes, there was the sky! how lovely it was! the fleecy white clouds sailing so peacefully over the azure surface, it soothed her to look at it—it did her good—it made her think of her parents, especially her mother—her blue-eyed mother, with her soft white face. And Katie softened even to regret for having spoken disrespectfully to her great-aunt.

She knew that even for *her* sake that blue-eyed mother up there in the bright sky would be sorry to see her give way to violence and evil temper.

How well she remembered in the days now passed for ever, when she was naughty—one tender look, one gentle rebuke, would quell the rising devil in her heart, and she felt that Miss Ansell and her cold contempt were to her like a red rag to a mad bull. At ten minutes to five Miss Ansell walked, without knocking, into the room. Kate, still gazing at the clouds with her head lying upon the sill of the open window, did not see her enter, and started at the harsh voice at her elbow.

“What, Miss Kerley,” gazing up into the skies as they did in the Scriptures!”

“I was thinking of my mother,” said Kate, softly; and then turning to her great-

aunt, she went on, "I am sorry I was rude to you, Miss Ansell, it grieved mother even up there, I think," with a glance at the blue heavens.

"Don't talk romantic nonsense, Katherine. Your mother is dead! what should she know about it? *Do your duty as I have done mine*, and you won't find time for such fine sentiments, I can assure you; as to your sorrow, I shall judge of that by your future conduct; and now smooth your hair and come down to dinner."

And Miss Ansell stalked out of the room, and Katie came back from the clouds, and from soft feelings to the stern realities of life.

When Sunday came round, Miss Ansell was, if possible, stiffer and more firm than ever.

Kate was waiting (according to orders)

half-an-hour too early, dressed for church—her pale face in relief against her black dress, black hat, and long flowing dark hair, when Miss Ansell came in and looked at her.

“You don’t look respectable, Miss Kerley,” she said, slowly.

Kate raised her eyes, but made no answer.

“Can you plait in three, Katherine,” she continued.

“Yes, Miss Ansell.”

“Then go to your room and put up all that untidy mass of hair as quickly as you can, into the smallest compass possible. I should have thought you would have had the decency to have done it without being told.”

Kate left the room without one word, and returned metamorphosed—the child seemed to have turned into a woman all at once—the large dark eyes looked larger and

darker, and the brushed-back hair showed the intellectual brow—the chin and mouth seemed more than ever determined.

Kate re-entered the room as if nothing had happened. The turning up of a girl's hair is, as it were, a landmark in her life, and she had been hurried past it with unkindly haste. She had had no pleasant half hour before her glass to try what style suited her best, but had found putting up her hair a stern reality of life! it was to be done in the smallest possible compass.

If Miss Ansell had studied the question deeply, and had wished her niece to look her very best, she could have given no better advice, for Kate's was a small, well shaped head, and the close coils of unpretentious plaits took nothing from its classical beauty, and discovered the swan-like neck which had hitherto been hidden behind the curtain

of her dark locks. On the whole Kate Kerley had no reason to regret her aunt's dislike to her "untidy mass of hair," in making her first appearance at Northley Church.

The service was a very prosy one, and Kate loved music—loved the painted glass, mellowing the light around her—loved everything that was beautiful, in fact wanted her senses appealed to by cross, candlesticks, and flowers.

At Northley Church there was nothing to fix her attention—a barn-shaped old building, whitewashed inside throughout—a very tall pulpit of dark wood, with a sounding-board hanging overhead which looked made to fit down into the pulpit, and Kate kept thinking what fun it would be to shut the old parson up in it, and laughed aloud at the idea of the noise he would make to be let out! an old square box for a reading

desk, with another smaller box for the clerk, who with deadly nasal twang gave out the hymns and did his other duties manfully.

What could Kate find to interest her in such a service, accustomed as she had been to "St. Alban's" and "All Saints'." But it was not long before she found that there was a great deal to amuse her. In front of her in a seat close to the pulpit, almost under it, sat a boy who was affected in his head. "Foolish Tom" they called him in the village. "Tom" had his wits and hadn't! he was not bad enough to shut up in an asylum, but he spoke a language only understood by his mother—a species of bellow and grimace expressing all he had to say. Tom never missed "saying his prayers" night and morning, but to whom they were addressed God only knows! Whether there was a glimmer of a higher

life in the idiotic brain, it is impossible to say, or whether he was merely a creature of imitation. "Tom" always came to church and always sat in the same place, held a prayer-book invariably upside down, turned over the leaves when the parson did, sang in his own fashion, without any words or the faintest tune, and made a mumbling, gurgling sound when the people responded. When there were only familiar faces in the church, Tom behaved himself fairly, but he could not resist the pleasure of surprising strangers; and Kate Kerley was not an exception to the rule. He began by making the most hideous grimaces at her, and the more manfully she endeavoured to withstand the temptation to laugh, the worse he became. She tried not to look at him—not to think of him—but it was a horrible fascination, and her eyes kept wandering back to him.

This continued for some time, and he went through his usual catalogue of peculiarities, and then, not feeling satisfied with his success, he hit upon a new and brilliant plan. Tom took off his boots and put them upon the book rail of the nearest pew, then his coat was removed. Kate was crimson with suppressed laughter and disgust, but unable to take her eyes off "Tom." What would happen next? she thought, when the droning voice of the parson ceased, and in its stead a sharp excited exclamation proceeded from the old pastor, "Jones, Jones! take Tom out of church!" Upon which the clerk slid out of his box and collared Tom, and essayed to remove him; but he was afraid of losing his property, which he had spread out neatly all along the front pew of the church, and a fearful struggle ensued, in which Tom had decidedly the best of it,

and the "honest sweat" stood upon, and dropped from the brow of poor old Jones—the clerk, beadle, sexton, pew-opener, town-crier, and general factotum of Northley. However, Tom, having secured every item of his belongings, one by one, at last went away like a lamb down the aisle, Mr. Jones holding on tightly behind, and as he passed Kate he gave her a final grimace worthy of Hengler's best clown!

"Let us pray," said the parson's droning voice, as Tom's footsteps became faint in the distance, and Kate hid her face in her handkerchief, and gave way to soundless laughter; but Miss Ansell, who had never moved a muscle of her face during the whole scene, gave such a virtuous tug at the skirts of her dress that Kate heard the gathers crack! The clerk resumed his place, wiped his forehead on a red pocket-

handkerchief, with yellow spots, and showed signs of great exhaustion.

Mr. Cotter, the clergyman, was a teetotalter, and believed in water; on it he had flourished seventy-five years—so he told his parishioners—and you never saw him without a carafe and tumbler by his side. On noticing Mr. Jones's fatigue he handed him down the tumbler filled with his favourite beverage, but the hot and tired clerk at first failed to notice the movement till recalled by Mr. Cotter, who said in a stage whisper, which was audible to the whole congregation, "Jones, drink some water, man!" He started up, and gulped some down at once, but Mr. Jones was not fond of water. Like "Meinherr van Dunk," he liked his brandy with as little water as possible, when the vicar was not in sight; and like the same renowned foreigner Mr.

Jones had never been drunk in his life !—so he said ; but, as he plaintively remarked, “ Digging graves all weathers was dreary work, and a sexton was a man who must keep his spirits up ! ”

Mr. Jones took up the responses, and the service proceeded quietly until the sermon began.

Mr. Cotter had been ill, and it was his first reappearance in public. He gave out his text upon the recovery of Hezekiah, and then looked round the church with a comical benignant smile.

“ Well, my beloved flock,” said Mr. Cotter, “ you see the Lord has raised me up, and here I am again ! You all thought I was going to die, now didn’t you ? and I daresay that you were wondering who the new parson would be, and now I’ve disappointed you, my boys, and there’s a kick

left in old Jack Cotter still, I can tell you."

Kate's eyes opened very wide. Here was something new in the shape of a sermon, and she thought it was great fun, if only they had opened the church windows or doors ; but it was so awfully hot and close, and the sun was pouring in at the diamond-paned window, casting its burning rays upon her till she began to wonder whether her dress would catch fire ! and she had not been listening long, or rather trying to listen to the sermon, when her attention was aroused by a scuffling in a pew not far off. A woman had been unable to stand the heat of the sun, and had fainted, and several people were pulling her about—untying her bonnet strings, loosening her collar, &c. &c.

"Jones !" called out Mr. Cotter from the

pulpit ; “ water—give her water !” and Mr. Jones again slid down, tumbler in hand, and doing, doubtless, as he would be done by, held the same meekly under her nose !

“ Give her some to drink, you fool,” called out Mr. Cotter, sharply. “ Throw it over her !” Upon which, remembering her new Sunday bonnet, she recovered, and Mr. Cotter proceeded with an eulogium upon the effects of water, which elicited a broad grin from a boy called Jim Sharp, for which Mr. Cotter thought it necessary to reprove him. “ I saw you laugh, Jim Sharp,” he said ; “ you’ll go to the devil as sure as I catch that bluebottle ! By Jove, I’ve missed him—there’s a chance for you yet, Jim.”

There was a great deal of good in Mr. Cotter’s sermon, and it was much more sublime than ridiculous. There is

doubtless good in every sermon that ever was written or preached, but such is human nature that Kate failed to carry home with her any of it but the above quotation from the whole of his long discourse.

Miss Ansell, like any other Christian, dined at one on Sundays, so as to let her servant go to church in the afternoon and evening ; but it is doubtful if she went, or if servants ever do go after the martyrdom and indigestion that most masters and mistresses go through to enable them to do so. If going without an egg in Lent for breakfast will get a soul out of purgatory, as has been averred, surely these masters and mistresses will have crowns of glory for all they suffer after their early Sunday dinners ! But Kate's healthy frame knew nothing of dyspepsia, and she had succeeded in eating a large slice of the raw-looking boiled leg of

mutton without ill effects. She was strong in mind and body, and was nothing daunted even by Miss Ansell's unpalatable dinners. This especial meal over, she followed her great-aunt solemnly into the drab and brown holland drawing-room, where the window was never opened, and was given "Jeremy Taylor" to read. For an hour poor Kate yawned over it behind the book, but never got beyond the first page. She kept beginning again and again, and finding there were no points to carry away, as it had been with Mr. Cotter's sermon.

At last Miss Ansell having finished her tract, over which she had uttered many righteous groans, fixed her cold stern eyes, on her great-niece, "Katherine, come and say your collect, epistle, and gospel !"

"I—I—I didn't know you expected me—I haven't learnt them," she stammered.

“Say your hymn and Catechism, then.”

“I haven’t learnt any hymn !”

Miss Ansell looked unutterable things.

“Katherine Kerley, did your mother spend Sunday as a heathen ?”

Kate’s eyes flashed, but she made no reply.

“Say your Catechism,” went on Miss Ansell.

Now Kate never could say her Catechism ; it was a mental defect, or perhaps it did not interest her, but she never said it perfectly in her life. The Nicene Creed was a slough of despond to her ; “I desire,” a maze from which she could find no exit. Her chief idea of the Commandments, and the one she never forgot, was the fifth, for she could, and did, heartily honour her father and mother. So when she was told to say her Catechism, she coloured very red, and sat still.

“What! has not your mother taught it to you?” thundered her great-aunt.

“Yes,” said Kate, “she did; but I’ve forgotten it.”

“Katherine Kerley! you are stiff-necked; I don’t believe any girl of your age can fail to know the Lord’s Commandments; say them at once!”

First, second, third, fourth, fifth, so far Kate got without a fault, scrambled on to the ninth and through it, but not correctly.

“The tenth?”

“I forget,” said Kate; “what’s it about, Miss Ansell? Oh! I know. Covetousness. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s *wife*, thou shalt not covet——”

“Stop!” cried Miss Ansell.

“It is *not* wrong,” said Kate. “I know it quite well. Thou shalt not covet thy

neighbour's wife, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house——”

“Wrong!” said her aunt, sternly. “I told you before it was wrong.”

“Well, what is it, Miss Ansell?”

“The first clause ends with house, the second with wife.”

“Then it's no business to be so,” cried Kate. “The wife ought to be first; a man has no right to think more of his house than of his wife, and it ought to be altered,” and Kate sat down with a determination to do no more.

“Katherine!” proceeded Miss Ansell, “it seems to me you are both ignorant and impudent; the latter is doubtless the consequence of the former, and I shall make it my serious and solemn duty to teach you better. Explain to me what you read out of ‘Jeremy Taylor’ this afternoon.”

“I can’t; I don’t think I read it at all. I certainly didn’t understand any of it!”

Miss Ansell groaned.

“I knew you would be a heavy cross, Miss Kerley, but I never expected you to be as bad as you are. Most people have some redeeming point, even your mother——”

“Miss Ansell!” cried Kate, bounding from her chair, “leave my mother at peace in her grave; if you regret your charity to me I will go back to Dr. Grafton.”

“‘He that putteth his hand to the plough and turneth back——’” said Miss Ansell, solemnly; but the arrival of the tea-tray broke the text in halves; and Kate consoled herself for the loss of the rest with a plentiful supply of bread and butter—while her aunt watched it disappear with dismay, and made a mental calculation of what an

extra quartern loaf at sevenpence a-day would add up to out of her slender yearly income. After tea she got a pen and ink and wrote some time in silence. "Katherine," she said, raising the written paper, "after the life you have led you must have rules and regulations to attend to for each hour of the six days of the week, and others for the seventh. I have written them for you and expect you to act up to them."

Kate had thought her mother's sweet, unobtrusive religion beautiful; but the Pharisaical life of her great-aunt, with the tithes of even her nail-parings and orange rinds, disgusted her beyond measure; with her duty standard always set up to measure her neighbours by, and her tongue sharpened to condemn the erring—if this were religion, Kate hoped fervently that she should never be religious.

And so her life went on for three long years.

She studied with her aunt, who was a well-informed old woman. The amount of scripture history that was crammed into Kate's small cranium was wonderful ; but all things must come to an end. So did Kate's lessons, and she was promoted to be a Sunday-school teacher and a district visitor !

Strange to say, with all her irreligion, Kate took pleasure in both these occupations, and fulfilled them well ; and some of the hard lines would go from her face when the little ones of her class brought their Sunday offerings of flowers from their own especial gardens. Rain over head, wet under foot, nothing kept Kate from the school, nor from the cottages ; and now she sat in her own room, looking out of her

window, reading her first love-letter! As usual, her face softened under its gentle influence as she gazed at the sky, and she felt she did not love George Grafton as her mother had loved her father; and for five minutes she determined to say "No," to write at once and say so, and she left the window and sat down to her little desk and began "My," and then felt uncertain how to go on. If she were going to refuse him she couldn't put "My" at all, for he would not be hers. After all, why should she refuse him? he was good, not ugly; rich, he loved her; and above all, he would deliver her out of the hands of Miss Ansell! her life of poverty would be exchanged for one of plenty and happiness. Why should she not be happy with George Grafton? He had the means of satisfying her smallest wish, her lightest whim; and she would see

the world and all the beautiful things it contained; go to dances, have horses, carriages and handsome dresses; no more raw, boiled mutton, but would be able to order all the things she liked best. Ah! how she wished these good things had come to her in the days when her father and mother had been alive. What joy to have given them handsome presents, just what she knew they required most! Now, Dr. and Mrs. Grafton would be her parents. Well, next to her own, she cared more for them than for any one else in the world, even better than George, though she was now contemplating becoming "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh."

After a while, Kate left the "My" and accepted the offer, without so much as consulting Miss Ansell.

The first that that good woman knew

upon the subject was the announcement of "Mr. George Grafton" by the astonished little maid-of-all-work, who had grown old in Miss Ansell's service, and was her right hand, or both her hands, if that expresses more.

Kate was not prepared for this visit, and her flushed cheeks and downcast eyes might well make the happy man think himself beloved. Alas ! poor George.

Miss Ansell was, of course, very angry with everybody; nothing could excuse Kate's deception and ingratitude, to say nothing of her immodesty in having accepted a young man she knew nothing of, without the advice and sanction of her natural protector. George was a most unprincipled young man, for tempting her to do wrong—at her age, too, a child, nothing but a child; and, truth to tell, though Miss Ansell had never got really fond of Kate, she loved to

bully her, and was aware that she should miss her.

Miss Ansell was getting old, and Kate did her needlework, kept her accounts, ran her errands, &c. &c.; and though Miss Ansell still called her "her cross," she was a very useful one indeed. But Miss Ansell knew the value of "loaves and fishes," and was proud in all ways but one. If you offered Miss Ansell anything little worth having she would refuse it with very erect head; but if it happened to be of value, she always found a "text" to bear her out in accepting it—and now she thought how blessed Kate would find it to repay her dear aunt for all her kindness and affection. Forty thousand pounds made George's principles quite different in Miss Ansell's eyes, and she forgave them both, giving them her blessing.



CHAPTER II.

“FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.”

NOT all her hopes of future benefits—
not all George Grafton's entreaties
—not all her Christian forgiveness
could induce Miss Ansell to allow him to
remain for the night under her roof. She
never had allowed a man to sleep in her
house, and never would ; so after five o'clock
dinner he had to take himself off home, so
as to arrive at midnight—poor old George !
His heart was light, and the miles flew
by without his noticing the lapse of time
and space, as he sat looking out into the
darkening night, building his airy castles
—the bower for his queen—the home for
his young wife. It should be such a bright

one ! for his little Kate—little Kate of five feet eight—as tall as himself nearly ; he was an inch taller perhaps, but she looked to have the advantage.

When he had got into the train the sun was shining on his love, on his thoughts, on his fancied home with its beauty of summer shade and winter warmth. How well he could picture the rooms, the flowers and birds, and Kate there always, and perhaps as time wore on little faces up-turned to his with rosy lips asking for kisses, little arms stretched out in welcome—Katie's children ! all with her large dark eyes !

George awoke to the present with a shriek from the engine, as if some evil spirit mocked him ! with cruel mockery of his rose-hued visions.

“ Worham, Worham,” called the sleepy station-master.

“Worham, Worham,” echoed the still more sleepy porters.

“Good night to you, Mr. George—any luggage?”

“No, thank you. Good night;” and with hasty, hopeful strides Mr. George Grafton turns towards his father’s house, regardless of the cabman’s pathetic “Cab, sir,” as that disconsolate being discovers that after waiting with his jaded horse for the last train to come in, he has not got a fare, so he administers a cut to the poor brute to vent his temper, and a damnatory clause to the world in general, the travellers by last trains in particular, and gallops his wretched “gee” up a steep hill to his stable, where he arrives with heaving flanks and painfully distended nostrils, and lies all night ungroomed in a cold sweat! Poor horses! Oh! that the patient, faithful

creatures had better treatment. Any one who can ill-use a horse or a dog is worse than he who will injure his fellow-man. Watch the expression of a horse's eyes—a worn-out suffering horse, and say if the bitterest tears on a human face ever told such a tale! Watch the dog who has just received a brutal kick from his master, and mark the agony of his feelings; his eyes would tell of a suffering spirit, not merely of bodily pain. This is a word in favour of “dumb brutes.” It is cowardly to hurt them, they dare not return the injury, few would, if they could, and they cannot tell you what they suffer.

George Grafton's marriage was fixed for the following August, only two months and he would be a Benedict! which thought made him eager to prepare the home he had pictured for Kate.

At Hazelhurst, about twelve miles from London, he found a beautiful detached cottage ornée, standing in an old well-grown garden, very different from the new laurel-bound plots of the present villa residences. Deodoras, mountain ash, ever-green oaks, elder trees in full bloom, bright double red hawthorn, and single white, “flourishing green baytrees,” showing you that they are not a biblical fiction; guelder roses, laburnam, lilac, rhododendron in glorious pyramids, roses in standards, honeysuckle, clematis both purple and white climbed everywhere, white noisette, banksia, Marshal Ney’s, and “gloires” clothed every wall and verandah!

This was a fit home for his wife, even George allowed, and set to work at once to furnish as he thought she would like it. Carpets of rich warm shades—none too

bright—crimson or amber hangings of costliest materials to suit Kate's dark beauty; black and gold furniture for her drawing-room, oak for the dining-room, and walnut for the third sitting-room. The conservatory, which opened out of the drawing-room, was a glory of bloom, and George looked round well pleased at it all, and thought that Kate could not fail to be happy here.

With George Grafton's fortune he need no longer work, but after due deliberation he made up his mind that idleness was good for no man, and especially for one of his age and active temperament; so he decided to go on with his business, the coffee trade, in the great city, which he could easily do from Hazelhurst.

Just before his marriage he ran against an old college chum whom he had not seen for years, the pleasure of the meeting was

mutual, and George told him a hearty welcome would await him at Hazelhurst, and made him promise to come down.

Harry Cartland had been wild in his early days, but most young fellows sow their "wild oats" before they settle down into staid bachelors or Benedicts; and George had no qualms of conscience in bringing him into contact with his young wife. Harry Cartland, so far as intellect and appearance went, outshone his friend thoroughly, but he was of a selfish, pleasure-loving disposition. If Cartland set his mind on anything, small or great, good or bad, he did it. Self-gratification was his law, and he acted well up to it. He was tall, over six feet in height, with a natural unstudied grace which never deserted him; olive skinned, dark haired, dark eyed, with a heavy falling dark moustache hiding his

mouth, had it been visible it was a well-shaped, though sensual mouth, with white square-cut teeth. The face, as a face, was perfect, undeniably handsome, and he was always well-dressed. He left College with George Grafton, and "saw life" in London for awhile, running through what small fortune he possessed. He was not burdened with relations, or good advisers. Harry Cartland was his own master, and in three years found it would be necessary for him to earn his own living, and having a friend, a London doctor, he made up his mind to be a medical man himself.

Want of brains was not one of Harry Cartland's faults, and he passed his examination creditably, and set up as a physician in the "West End." He soon became "the fashion." He knew exactly how to please his lady patients, how to intrude into his

voice tender sympathy, to touch them gently with his white, well-formed hands ; he knew even when to glitter the diamond ring upon his little finger, when to flash looks of interest from his handsome dark eyes, looks of pity, looks of congratulation, looks of *affection*. Ladies like their doctors to be kind, affectionate, and gentle, and Dr. Cartland knew the exact amount to administer to each. He never overdosed them, never sent them away dissatisfied ; ladies' feelings were even more his study than medicine. He found sympathy a better tonic than quinine. But with all his tenderness of manner he was so far heartwhole ; if he made love at all it was to advance himself in his profession. He knew that Lady Henrietta de Courcy would tell Lady Jane Willoughby how charming he was, how clever, how kind, how sympa-

thetic, and such a perfect gentleman! and he was equally aware that Lady Jane would turn up before the week was out, and that she would tell her friend Mrs. de Jones Smith how miraculously he had cured her neuralgia! and if he could do that he could do anything!

So Dr. Cartland prospered, and became a great man, and a rich one, and those who wished to consult him had to make an appointment at least a week beforehand. His patients were often kept a fortnight waiting for advice, but then you know, "his time was not his own." He was so very busy—so much sought after!

August was not long in coming round, bright, warm, glowing August, and with it came Kate's wedding-day. Miss Ansell did her duty to her great-niece to the last. Kate was married from her house. She even gave

a wedding-breakfast, such as it was. The under-done mutton was exchanged for a sodden ham, an old cock was slaughtered for the festive occasion, a pie, with crust two inches thick, also graced the table, but no one ever ventured to look what was inside! Of buns, and tarts, and "fingers," there were enough for a charity-feast, apples, oranges, very pithy and juiceless in obedience to the season, and really nice fruit from the walled-in garden at the back of the house, and two decanters of Marsala! Had not Miss Ansell, indeed, done her duty?

Everybody at Northley went to see the wedding, even "Silly Tom." The day was fine, but Kate saw with superstitious awe that they had to pass by an open grave! She had wished for a quiet wedding, and she had it. Only members of the Grafton family were present at the breakfast, except-

George's best man, Dr. Cartland, and he was the life and soul of the breakfast. He laughed, told stories, made jokes, won golden opinions, and even flirted with Miss Ansell. Who could be offended with him? His manners were perfect, so thought Laura Grafton, Kate's oldest bridesmaid, and so thought Kate herself. Are not all wedding-breakfasts too wearily alike to attempt to describe? There were, of course, speeches in which the health of everybody was drank, and George Grafton, with new-born importance and dignity, returned thanks for himself and *his wife*. No single man, no older married man, can handle the word in the same way. Did any one ever hear a man speak of his *wife* in the same tone after he brings her back from the honeymoon?

George took his bride through Switzerland. She did most of the sight-seeing on horse-

back—he, walking by her side—and Kate was delighted. She had never been out of England before, and felt a thrill of ecstasy at the sight of Mont Blanc, at the Lake of Geneva, at all the blue mountains, and picturesque soft scenery, and at the end of a happy month they returned to England, and took possession of their pretty home.

And Kate had to confess that her husband's taste had been perfect in his choice of everything; even the Victoria that stood at the station, waiting for her, with two shiny bays with black points, who were pawing the ground in their impatience to carry Mrs. George Grafton home. But Katie, looking in her husband's face, knew still that she did not love him as she ought to do, though she believed she could be quite as happy as the passive agent in the verb to love, and was glad that she had married him

They were not long settling down in their new home, and visitors poured in on Katie. Little as she had seen of society, she received them with natural grace and good-breeding.

Among the callers came Dr. Cartland, rather later than the rest, after his work, and George arrived from town before he had been there long, and kept him to dinner; after which they spent the lovely September evening in the garden.

Kate, dressed in a pure white muslin, with a crimson rose at her breast, and another in the wealth of her dark hair, looked even lovelier than she had done on her bridal-day. So thought George, and in Dr. Cartland's eyes she was the only handsome woman he had ever seen in his life. As he looked at her, he was bound to acknowledge there was something wanting

in her face ; and after a while he found out what it was, not then, not till long after ; but the face, as it was, fascinated him more than any had ever done before. He had seen prettier women, lovelier women, pink and white, creamy milky-faced women ; but what were they compared to Mrs. Grafton, with her wistful brown eyes, in which were such untold depths, unknown even to herself. Her clear dark complexion, her perfect lissom figure.

Dr. Cartland watched her with the painful knowledge gathering about his heart that he was, for the first time in his life, in love—in love with a girl he had seen but twice—in love with his friend's wife. Of course, as a man of honour, he was bound to keep away from Hazelhurst, and, of course, as a man of the world, he didn't. Who ever knew a moth to fly away from a candle because it would

sing his wings? Who ever knew a selfish pleasure-seeking man forego the happiness of the moment for the good of the future?

No! Dr. Cartland smiled upon his patients till three o'clock; then, his arduous duties over, he threw himself into his well-lined brougham, with one word only, "Hazelhurst." Not to make love to Mrs. Grafton, but to see her, touch her hand, inhale her beauty with every breath.

Had Harry Cartland spoken, or even looked love at Kate, it would have been her salvation; but he did neither. He only loved her, none the less madly because he was silent. Had you asked him, or had he asked himself how he expected it all to end, he would have been unable to answer. But, doubtless, he lived in the present only, and trusted to the future to take care of itself. He had not once told himself that

he could gain Kate's love, she was still his friend's wife to him! But to be near her, with her, was necessary to him. So long as he was satisfied in this, he need not be dangerous, except perhaps to Kate's inner heart. He would not while thus satisfied seek any change.

Winter evenings saw the college friends smoking their pipes together, found Harry Cartland by Kate's side at the piano, spell-bound by the rich, full tones of her voice. The love words of her songs sunk into his heart, making mighty echoes that warned him to go while there was yet time, while the love he bore her was yet innocent, still unspoken. But he was deaf, deaf to everything but the wild pleading of his heart for love. Up to now, he had never for one moment believed that she cared for *him*, had indeed no reason for thinking anything but

the right and proper thought that she loved her husband, George Grafton. But now with "*Si tu savais*" sounding in his ears, the unusual tremor in her voice subdued him, and there was a softness in her face, about her lips that he had never seen before, the something that had been wanting was there now, and Kate was not only handsome, but beautiful. A lovely flush upon her cheeks, a new light in her eyes. What was it? Was it love? love for *him*! And Harry Cartland's pulses throbbed to madness.

He leant over her, touching her, "Kate, Kate!"

She raised her eyes to his. What answer did he read in them? They were filled with tears and love.

Yet on the brink of temptation, they were saved; for happy, unconscious George

came in, and Kate flew to him as to a harbour of refuge. She had only just found out her danger, but now it dawned upon her; what had made the happiness of the autumn and winter evenings? She knew she had been happy, but had not stopped to analyse her feelings, and now she had found the key to the mystery. It was not her love for her husband that had shed such brightness over her daily life, but for another.

She was more humble, more gentle, more painstaking to George, than she had ever been before, and he, poor fool, was happy, happy in his fools' paradise. And Harry Cartland was happy, wildly happy in the knowledge of her love, happier than if she had told him of it, for the tongue can be made to lie; but no one could doubt those trembling lips, those tearful, speaking eyes. They told the secret that Kate would have

wished to carry to her grave; but she felt that it was known to *one* now; and in her heart she knew that *she* had learnt one in return; and somehow, hard as she tried to shut this knowledge out, it asserted itself again and again, vibrating through her nerves with painful pleasure.

Kate coaxed her husband to get home half-an-hour earlier, so as to avoid the daily tête-à-tête with Harry Cartland, yet she loved him and he knew it, and knew herself beloved. She could not shut him out of her life, but she wished to be a good wife, and true to George. So, when Dr. Cartland's brougham left him at Hazelhurst, he found two friends to receive him instead of one, and perhaps he was not altogether sorry.

While a child only sucks the barley sugar, it lasts a long time, "linked sweetness long drawn out;" but when he begins to eat it in

good earnest, it is soon crunched away between his relentless little teeth. Does the child ever regret not having made his pleasure last as long as possible, or is the excitement of the "scrunching" and the remembrance of it preferable in his estimation. Dr. Cartland had taken one small bite and had found it delicious, but while the barley sugar remained in his mouth, he was content that it should melt ever so gently, so long as he lost none of its sweetness and flavour, and things went on as before, and summer came round again.

Kate had not quite such good spirits as of old ; she was thinner and paler, and George's anxious eyes found it out. In vain she assured him that she was well—yes ! and happy, but he was not satisfied and went down to Dr. Cartland's house and consulted him about her.

Yes! Dr. Cartland had noticed the alteration in Mrs. Grafton which George spoke of—he would watch her more closely (could he?) and tell him his opinion to-morrow, and then George Grafton turned to his friend: “Harry! I hope I may *not* have to go away, but something has gone wrong about the coffee, and I am really afraid I shall have to run over to Ceylon and see what they are up to; all my fortune is in the business, and I must, for Kate’s sake, do the best I can. I am certain they are not growing it as we used to do, or the crop never could have failed as it has done this year.”

Harry Cartland expressed his hope that his friend might be saved such a long journey, and that the next growth of coffee might prove better! and then George spoke again—“I should not mind leaving her so much, if she looked as well and as strong as she did a

year ago, but she doesn't—if I go, Harry, you will see her constantly and watch her as carefully as if she were your own—you will promise," he continued, seeing Dr. Cartland hesitate.

"Of course, I shall be very happy to do so, Grafton," said the other; "and you may trust me to do all I can for her in your absence."

A keener observer than poor George, would have noticed the increase of colour, the unusual agitation of his voice, the eagerness of his eyes.

"I shall be truly glad if you will."

"Very well," answered Dr. Cartland with a sigh of relief; "I will promise to see her often and watch her closely, only you had better let her know it is your wish before you leave, or she might not like me to come."

“Never fear,” laughed George Grafton; “Kate is above such nonsense, and will always have a smile of welcome for my friend, you may be sure.”

So George himself set the ball of his destiny rolling with his own hands—poor honest-hearted George who thought no evil. That day in the City decided that he must go to Ceylon or be a most serious loser, even perhaps a ruined man, inasmuch as the loss of money can bring ruin. The only chance of setting things going again, was the personal superintendence of one who was thoroughly interested and who understood the matter in all its branches. George was the man, and he must go even though he must needs leave his wife at home.

Poor George Grafton! Does nothing warn you to let money—everything go, only to remain by the side of the girl you have

promised to love and to cherish? When he returned home he did not find it an easy matter to break to Kate this sudden and unexpected journey, and something in the unusual pallor of her cheek, and the sad wistful eyes made the task more painful, and when she advanced to meet him, with two small hands outstretched, all he could do was to take her willowy form in his arms, and hold her to his heart silently.

Something in his manner startled her, and freeing herself from his embrace she looked earnestly in his moved face.

“George,” she whispered, “what is it?”

All possible and impossible terrors crowded into her mind; had he heard those words “Kate, Kate,” which though spoken six months ago have vibrated ever since through her heart. Had she talked in her sleep of the fatal secret gnawing at her inmost soul?

Had he seen her danger, and was he now going to warn her against it? In truth she hoped it might be so. She could not confess her unworthiness, but if he had guessed it and would help her against herself, how glad, how thankful she would be. She felt that he was a just man, and that he would help her if he knew, even though it broke his heart.

But when with emotion he said, "My own Kate, I must leave you," she gazed at him white lipped.

"Good God!" she cried out. "Why, what have you found out?"

The words might have conveyed a deeper meaning to a more suspicious man, but to George Grafton they meant nothing but what was said.

"I have found out, my wife, that I shall be a ruined man if I don't look after my

own business ; and that my little Kate will have to give up her pretty home, her horses and carriages, and all the things that go to make the sweetness of her life, and will have to dress in cotton frocks, and cook her own dinners, and spoil those dear white hands ; and to prevent all this I must go myself to Ceylon, and put matters straight ; but oh ! my pet" (drawing her to him), " it is hard to part from you !"

" Don't go ! Oh, George ! don't leave me for Heaven's sake, don't !" and she clung to him with detaining arm.

" Katie, don't you know I would give anything on earth to stay, but I cannot make you a beggar, and must do my duty, my little Kate."

" Do your duty !" she cried, with flashing eyes, " that is what Miss Ansell would say. Don't you say it, George. Don't ; stay

with *me*, that is your most sacred duty ; let the money go—all of it, every penny. I will work, we will both work, and we will go away from here, and we will be happy,” said Kate looking gently and timidly at him. “ We should be happy, George, should we not ? ” and she slipped her cold little hand into the large brown protecting one of her husband.”

“ My own brave darling ! ” he answered, love beaming on her from his bright true eyes. “ You have made me very very happy, but I cannot accept such a sacrifice from you.”

“ Ah ! you would not be happy in poverty with me,” sighed Kate, turning from him wearily. “ I thought you loved me, George ! ”

In another moment he had his arms about her, and was looking earnestly into the depths of her brown eyes.

“Kate,” he cried, “it is impossible that you can doubt me, my one and only love! Did I not wait for three years patiently, with not even a smile from those dear eyes, to make you all my own, and now you say you thought I loved you! Oh, Kate! Kate!”

She trembled as he spoke. George was not great at making speeches. Even when he proposed to her it had been in a few words, but what he had said moved her and kept her silent, it was all so true; he had waited for her, loved her, heaped upon her every pleasant thing, and she!—she knew that two words from another man had had the power of reaching where all poor George’s consistent kindness had failed to gain a heart’s response.

“George!” she pleaded yet again, “Don’t go.”

“ Kate ! I must ! ”

A light came into her face, and looking eagerly at him she placed her hand upon his arm.

“ Then I will go with you.”

“ Indeed, it is impossible, Kate.”

“ George, I am afraid to be left,” and the large eyes looked haunted.

“ There is nothing to fear, Kitty,” and he took her hand.

When he called her “ Kitty ” it was in his tenderest moods, but Kate turned from him almost coldly. “ How do you know that there is nothing to fear ? George, the day you leave me will be the last time you will ever see me in this world. I feel—I know it.” And Katie’s features were drawn with agony as with blind eyes she faced her fate.

“ Kate ! my wife, you are ill, or you

would never with your strong mind let such fancies run away with you. Thank God ! here is Cartland ! I see his carriage at the door !” and George Grafton hurried from the room.

A deadly sickness had come over her. Kate felt as if life were deserting her. She had pleaded with all her strength against her destiny, against herself, and it was all in vain, her husband had not understood her danger, and now she must face it alone ; and, as if that were not agony enough, here was that other coming even now to torture her with such sweet, bitter pain. Every word he uttered would echo in her heart, every look be mirrored back ; and then there came a thought at first of relief, succeeded by pain. Probably, when George was gone he would not come any more ; she hoped he would not. Yes ! she forced her-

self to say she hoped he would not; and then with a start she found he was by her side, looking at her with those large magnetic eyes that ever held her in their power. She tried to give them back a calm look, and then feebly burst into tears. Kate the tearless—Kate the fearless—was shrinking and trembling beneath the passionate gaze of Dr. Cartland.

Much as he longed to clasp her to his heart, and dry her wet eyes with his impassioned lips, he commanded himself; not to spare her, but to make her more surely his own. Did he not feel that so long as Kate had her husband to fly to, she was not in his power; but with George Grafton safely out of the way, with the permission to come—to come and see Kate whenever he chose, which poor foolish George had given him—he was as sure of his game as the

deadliest marksman who ever lifted gun to shoulder. Indeed, Dr. Cartland could afford to be generous now, and calm poor Katie's fears.

"Mrs. Grafton, your husband has sent me to have a little talk with you. He came to me this morning to tell me that you are not feeling well!" and he drew a chair up just opposite to her, and looked in her face with the gentleness that had made his name as a lady's doctor. "I like to sit opposite my patients, Mrs. Grafton, and have a good look at them. You are my patient now, so you must submit to be looked at." As he saw the angry red flush her cheek and brow, and the trembling of the lower lip—"Tell me, child, what ails you."

As he spoke the tears rushed unbidden to her eyes.

"I don't know what ails me, Dr. Cart-

land, but I am ill," and more than ever the trembling lips worked with suppressed pain.

How nearly she threw herself at his feet and asked him to leave her, never to return, for the love of God ! but then, with rosy red upon her cheek she grasped what acknowledgment that would be to him, and she tried to gather her scattered thoughts.

"As I said before, Dr. Cartland, I am ill, but I never asked my husband to send for you."

Dr. Cartland gave her a forgiving smile.

"I suppose, Mrs. Grafton, I ought to be offended with you, but," lowering his tone, and looking at her steadfastly, "there is nothing on earth I would not do for you ; and whether you wish it or no I *will* be your friend ! Give me your hand upon that bargain."

Her friend ! She might still retain him without disloyalty to George, and her heart

gave a wild bound of joy at this compromise between love and duty, and she stretched out an eager little hand to her tempter.

While they were so, clasped hand in hand, George Grafton entered the room. Were they not ratifying their friendship! and Kate turned to meet her husband with unfaltering eyes.

“See, George, Dr. Cartland and I are making a compact to be friends.”

“Mrs. Grafton was not at first quite willing to let me be her friend in your absence, George, and was not best pleased with me for wishing to see her stronger; but I think at last she has consented to let me feel her pulse,” taking her slender wrist into his hand, but looking at her husband. “A poor, weak, fluttering little pulse, George—feel it,” and he passed the wrist into George’s brown palm.

“There ! that will do,” cried Kate. “I hate doctors, or, at least, I hate being *doctored*,” and she blushed as she remembered that there was at least one doctor whom she did not hate.

“How do you find her, Harry ?” asked George.

“Weak and nervous ; she must have a tonic.”

“If George would only take me for a trip to Ceylon, it would do me more good than anything else,” said Kate.

“I think not,” answered Dr. Cartland. “You want quiet, rest, and care, not excitement.”

“Exactly my idea,” said George. “No, Katie, you shall not be sacrificed ; you shall be at peace in your own home, and I will fight the battle for you, and get back as soon as I can.”

“What going, Dr. Cartland, so early? Well, if you must, you must,” and Kate held out a hand, kind, but not detaining, nor did George ask him to dinner that night, for he was so soon to be away from his wife that he wished for the intervening time to be spent alone with her.

“Good-by, George ; come back soon, God bless you.”

“God bless you, dear wife ; my heart is heavy at leaving you. Now the time has come for parting, all the pluck has gone out of me. Kate ! Kate ! my little Kate ! do you know how precious you are to me !” and he clasped his left arm tightly about her, while he held both her hands in his one right one. “Is it too late to come with me now, Kate ?” he asked, his hungry eyes feeding on her beauty, and trying to take enough into his heart to satisfy it during his absence.

“It is never too late,” she cried, joyfully.
“Do you mean it? Will you take me?”

“Would you come even now, Kitty, with nothing ready?”

“Try me!” and she looked eagerly at him.

“No, no! I am a selfish brute even to wish it. I must not take you, darling!”

The light faded from her face, but she made no answer. Once more he held her to his heart, and something very like tears glistened in his moist blue eyes. Once more he pressed his lips to hers, the lips that would unite no more in life. Once more the hands were clasped, and yet again; and George was gone—Kate left alone. No! not alone! Had she not Dr. Cartland still? But the idea failed to comfort her.



CHAPTER III.

LAURA GRAFTON'S VISIT.

IR. CARTLAND was sitting in an easy chair, smoking a first-rate cigar, and as he watched the white clouds of smoke ascend and disappear, a smile crossed his face. “*So* will vanish all clouds from the blue sky of my love, and there will be nothing left but sunshine for my darling and me. Grafton has been gone a week to-day. I wonder if Kate has been dull? it will be as well that she should feel lonely till I come; but a week’s loneliness will surely be enough to make her glad of a comforter. Katie! Ah! well, if the week has not been long to her it has been to me.

"I cannot wait any longer," and he rose and rung his bell and ordered his brougham.

Kate had been dull, had found the week a very long one. At first she hoped Dr. Cartland would not come; had then reproached him in her heart for staying away. Was this his friendship? She was weary of everything. What a blank life was without George, and then she buried her face in her hands with shame, for though she did miss her husband she knew that there was another step she had listened for each day of the seven since George had left, and that she wearied in the waiting with a sickening heart. She would not own to herself that she wanted him to come; but why didn't he? that was what troubled her, not his absence. Was he ill? if so, it was of course nothing to her, but oh! what a pain shot through her heart, for which she could find

no reason. She often felt a "stitch" now. She rose and looked at her face in the glass.

"How pale," she exclaimed, "and George only gone a week; what shall I look like if he is away six months?"

Dr. Cartland had entered and had heard these words, and they did not please him.

"Such a devoted wife would certainly not exist through so long a period of desolation, I am sure, Mrs. Grafton. I have called to inquire how the tonic suits you?" and he advanced and coldly shook her hand.

It was best so, much best; yet somehow this was not the sort of meeting Kate had expected with him. What had she expected? she had never pictured his greeting, and yet she had looked for more warmth, more colour. Kate could be cold too, so accepted

Dr. Cartland's frigid hand with her fingertips, and then sat down.

"The tonic! oh, you are very good, Dr. Cartland, but I had quite forgotten it."

"And do you intend to continue your forgetfulness?" he asked.

"Probably."

"And, in fact, as your medical man I am *dismissed*," he went on, indignantly.

"I did not say so, but pray take it in that light if you like."

Then a silence, broken by Kate, "George has beautiful weather for his journey."

"Very fine, indeed," said Dr. Cartland, aloud. But in his heart he wished George was dead. What did Kate want to talk of him now for, and why was she so cold?

Another silence, broken by him—

"It is a long time since I last saw you,

Mrs. Grafton. What have you been doing with yourself? Have you been dull?

“Dull!” she cried, with a quiver in her lip, “oh no! of course I have been as gay as a lark, as merry as a cricket, and all my friends have been so kind to me that I have not been left alone one day during the week—not once. What do you think of that, Dr. Cartland, now, haven’t I kind friends?”

“If Mrs. Grafton has been alone at all it must have been from choice; of that I’m certain.”

“But it has not been from choice, and you know it. No one has been near me, not even you”—stopping herself suddenly.

“Not even me?” said Dr. Cartland, quietly.

“I did not say you,” answered Kate, pettishly. “Why *should* you come?”

“Why, indeed; I am not wanted, am I?”

“But I have been dull, very dull,” she went on, not appearing to hear him; “and I shall write and ask Laura Grafton to come and stay with me, she will at least be some one to speak to.”

This was a shock to Dr. Cartland, but he would not show it.

“Will Miss Grafton stay long with you?”

“Oh! I really don’t know,” answered Kate, wearily; “very likely till George comes back.”

With difficulty the doctor suppressed an oath; but recovering himself, he asked, “When will she come?” and then an idea shot across his brain—he would utilise her—and with a look of interest he remarked, “You must pardon me, Mrs. Grafton, if I seem curious, but I am a warm admirer

of Miss Laura Grafton—we are great friends.”

“Warm admirer—great friends,” repeated Kate, vacantly, with uncertain colour; “I—I did not know; George never told me.”

“Now, wont you tell me when to come and see her, Mrs. Grafton?”

“Soon, next week; whenever you like. You wont think me unkind, Dr. Cartland, if I ask you to go, but I don’t feel well, I can’t quite get over—George’s going away.”

She ended up the sentence with an effort, for the lie stuck in her throat.

“Take my tonic,” said he, kindly; “if you will promise to do so I will run in to-morrow and see how it agrees with you.”

He shook her cold hand gently, and left her without another word, and Kate sank down into her chair, wearily.

“So he cares for Laura; and I, fool that

I was, thought he loved me. How much better so, how thankful I ought to be. Oh George! George! I am thankful to be spared temptation"—and yet she shed bitter tears, tears over the wicked, forbidden love that was so sweet to her—"I shall get over it now that I know he loves another," she murmured, "I must write and get her here at once. It is much best so, and I can help him to be happy; yes, I am glad," and Kate sat down to her davenport and wrote her invitation to her sister-in-law, asking her to come and stay a month. "He can say all he has to say in that time, I should fancy," she said to herself, with a sad smile; "I am glad, but the flesh is weak, perhaps I could not bear it much longer," and Kate put on her hat and took the letter to the post herself.

The next afternoon Dr. Cartland's

brougham was again at Mrs. Grafton's door, as the neighbours remarked, and the owner stepped out, well-dressed, handsome as ever. Kate was lying on the sofa; a smile flitted over her lips when he entered. Why should she be cold to him now? her future brother-in-law.

"How is my patient to day?" he asked, her smile reflected on his face.

"Mrs. Grafton, you haven't taken the medicine!"

"Yes, but I have," laughed Kate.

"Then it isn't the right sort, for indeed you are looking ill."

"It was what *you* prescribed, at any rate, Dr. Cartland."

"Yes, yes!" he murmured half aloud; "we must go on with it for the present, it will make things more sure by-and-by—poor Katie, I am sorry you suffer."

“What are you talking about?” she asked, sharply. “I can understand plain English, but I can’t understand that.”

Dr. Cartland laughed. “I was thinking of a medicine I should like to give you, but I don’t think the system is properly prepared for it yet. You shall have it by-and-by, and I shall see you, with the old roses back again.

“Why don’t you speak to me, Mrs. Grafton?”

“Dr. Cartland,” she answered, “I know you well enough to claim the privilege of silence; talk to me and I will listen. Laura will be here to-morrow or the next day, and then you will have to amuse her.”

“Shall I read to you then? I should like to amuse you, though you don’t seem to think so.”

“I should enjoy it so much,” cried Kate.

“It would be ever so much pleasanter than talking, there doesn’t seem to be anything worth talking about now George has gone,” and she sighed heavily.

“Yet,” he answered, looking in her eyes, “I have seen you daily for twelve months, and we have never lacked conversation before. Why is it so?” and he held out his hand to her.

“I thought you were going to read,” she said. “It would be far better than asking me riddles which I cannot answer; ask yourself; you are older and wiser than I, Dr. Cartland.”

“If I were to tell you my answer, you would not like it, so I will look for a book.”

He rose and walked to the table.

“‘The Idylls of the King,’ will you have that?” and without waiting for her answer,

he sat down and read the sad and touching tale of the love of Launcelot and Guinevere.

Dr. Cartland read well and impressively, and what with the soft haunting tones of the man she loved, and the story of the unhappy Queen—so like her own—Kate's whole heart was carried away, tears coursed slowly down her cheeks, and weeping for Guinevere's woes, she wept for her own. Hungrily listening for Launcelot's passionate love, she felt the words which her love should speak to her.

Dr. Cartland paused—the passion of Launcelot had stirred his own. There lay his Guinevere, and in another moment he was on his knees beside her. His lips pressed in maddest wildness to hers which had so lately received George's last kiss—his arms about her light young form—his words of love falling on the ears which had

heard George's parting blessing only a little week since—a week and a day.

“Kate, Kate, my one love, forgive me—forgive me, darling!”

And for one short space she clung to him she loved with wildly clasping arms—only for a moment! She had had her heaven, now she must bear the remorse!

What! George's wife in the arms of another, with beating, guilty, throbbing heart, and that other the lover of George's sister. She had indeed fallen low!

With a bitter cry she started up, with burning cheek and fevered eyes.

“It was all that book,” she cried. “I was Guinevere, not myself; you were Launcelot, not yourself,” and springing to her feet she trampled the fallen book upon the ground.

“You shall never read to me again, Dr. Cartland, never. Go! go!”

Awakened thus rudely from his mad act, Cartland regained his feet. He saw it was no time to urge the excited girl—panic-stricken as she was by the violence of her own feelings—he took her hand.

“Forgive me, Kate, I have been mad ; but God knows I love you, in that I am not Launcelot, but my own wretched self !”

She trembled exceedingly.

“Go ! Dr. Cartland, go !” and she clung to the chair back in which he had sat for support.

“One word first,” he entreated. “You are not angry with me ?”

“Oh ! go ! go !” she cried, and with a backward look of love he obeyed her, and Kate Grafton sunk upon her knees and buried her face among the pillows of the sofa.

Oh ! that she could bury her shame—and yet, oh ! God, what bliss to feel his lips—to

know he loved her—if only for that brief space. If all the future belonged to Laura Grafton, that minute no one could take from her—when heart beat to heart—pulse to pulse in passionate love.

So Kate, meaning to be penitent, found herself exultant. And, right or wrong, she had for one glorious, shameful moment, loved and been loved.

When Dr. Cartland's carriage stopped next day at Mrs. Grafton's, he learned that she had just gone out for a drive, and went away annoyed and disappointed. She loved him, that he could no longer doubt, with all the warmth of her passionate young heart; the blood surged madly through his veins as he remembered her beauty, and felt in imagination again the pressure of her arms, as for one moment of ecstasy she clasped them around him.

“ Why has she gone out to avoid me ?” he said half aloud. “ She cannot escape me. No ! by Heaven she shall be mine. How I love the girl ! My God ! how I love her ! I would sooner give up everything on earth than lose her. My lovely Kate.”

The next day he called again, and Mrs. Grafton was at home. This time the neighbours remarked that the brougham was dismissed without its master, and shook their heads in silence ; the time had not come to speak yet, but they took their notes so as to be well armed in case it ever should.

Already Miss Perkins (living opposite) had made several entries in her diary, with the spirit of retributive justice in her heart. If ever dates should be wanted against Mrs. Grafton, she, Miss Perkins, would have them ready to hand. And why ? had Mrs. Grafton ever injured Miss Perkins ? No ! but she

sinned against her sex by being young and handsome, rich, and well dressed, by having a husband and an admirer, while so many Miss Perkinses were left out in the cold !

But this time Miss Perkins' entry might have been omitted, for Laura Grafton was by Kate's side, and of the two a stranger would have said the former was the object of Dr. Cartland's attentions, and that she received them with pleasure. They carried on nearly all the conversation, taking but little notice of Kate, who with downcast eyes and bent neck, was trying to work at some gossamer fabric, which would have become point lace by-and-by, had she not ruined it utterly with her trembling fingers. This, then, was the man for whom she was on the broad road to ruin ! But two days since and he had confessed his love for her in

wild abandonment, and now, before her face, he was making "strong running" with her sister-in-law. Oh! if only she could have loved George like this! Poor George!

At last Laura turned to her a happy flushed face.

"Why! what a quiet mouse you are, Kate! One would hardly know you were in the room! What is the matter? Why I do believe you are crying."

"Then you believe wrong, Laura," exclaimed Kate, throwing back her head. "But I am very tired of work! shall we go into the garden, the room is so hot?"

Dr. Cartland rose and looked at her, then came closer, and felt her pulse.

"Mrs. Grafton, you are ill to-night, you are more fit for bed than the garden. We have been selfish, and have overlooked you in our pleasant talk of old times."

Miss Grafton had taken up the work which Kate had dropped.

“ Good gracious, Kate, how badly you do lace stitches, this will never be of any use, it’s a perfect waste of time to go on with it; only look at it, Dr. Cartland, is it not a tangle?”

He took the work into his hand, it was quite enough to tell him what she had suffered, and he somehow forgot to put it down again. He longed to take Kate to his breast, and tell her his heart was all her own ; but with Laura Grafton standing by, it was impossible. So he took his leave, but only to return again the next day.

Laura and Kate were sitting alone ; they had been together three weeks, and yet another week would elapse before they parted. Laura held in her hand a bonnet.

“ Kate, your taste is better than mine, do

tell me how to make this bonnet wearable with a mauve dress for the Horticultural tomorrow."

Mrs. Grafton looked up.

"Why that bonnet's blue, Laura."

"I know it is, but, don't people blend blue and mauve together now?"

"I dare say they do, but I couldn't lend a helping hand in such a combination;" and then, seeing a disappointed look cross Laura's face she went on, "I shall not go to the flower show, you shall have my new bonnet, it is *écru*, and will go well with your dress."

"You are a dear. Oh, that is kind of you, Kate. You have good taste, and the bonnet's a perfect love. *Écru*! and Dr. Cartland said the other day it was his favourite colour, do you remember?"

Did she remember? Ay, that she did. Had she not gone off at once to her milliner and ordered an *écru* bonnet, so as to look her best; and had she not tried it on with conscious pride—seeing how well she looked in it before her glass—a pride that Laura Grafton’s could not reflect such a face. But though she had the bonnet something forbade her to “hoist” another man’s “colours;” and now the sacrifice was made and Laura was going to dress to please his taste, not she.

“Do you remember?” repeated Miss Grafton, receiving no reply.

“Yes,” answered Kate, calmly, “that is why I offered it to you. There is no surer way to a man’s approbation than remembering his tastes.”

“Do you mean, Kate, that you think I want to please him?”

“I am sure you do,” answered Kate, with the ghost of a smile.

“And do you think he cares for me?”

If a face could get whiter than white, Kate's did so, but she maintained her calmness. “To judge by appearances he likes you very much.”

“But, you know what I mean Kate, do you think he cares for me as George did for you? do you think he wants me for his wife?”

His wife! Poor Kate's heart stood still. She had never, even in the pictures she had drawn in her imagination, got so far as that. She knew *she* could never be his wife. His love, his darling, was all she could be to him, and she had never once remembered another could be more. So she sat in a silent stupor, unable to give an answer to the question.

“Don’t be reserved, Kate; you have gone through it and I haven’t. I never had an offer in my life. Do you think Dr. Cartland would have proposed if you had given him the opportunity?”

“How should I know?” she cried, in a tone of agony. “He shall have the opportunity, never fear, Laura. Good heavens! how my head runs round; do ring for some water.”

“How selfish of me to be bothering you with my affairs, Kate,” taking her hand and rubbing it. “Why, you are as cold as ice this hot day, and you are but the shadow of your old self now I look at you closely. I must speak to Dr. Cartland about you, Kate.”

“Dr. Cartland again,” said Kate, impatiently, “are we never to hear any other name—never to see any other face?”

“Why, I thought you were such friends,” said Laura, with wide-open, astonished eyes.

“Friends? of course we are; but one grows tired of one’s best friends if one has too much of them, you know.”

Laura looked at her. “Kate, you look very ill.”

“I am not ill; if George were only back, I should be quite well.”

“And you wouldn’t get tired of him?” asked Laura, with a laugh.

“Never!” cried Kate, with such energy as to startle her sister-in-law. “Oh! how I wish he were here.”

Kate had to go to the flower show, after all. Dr. Cartland declined most positively to take an unmarried lady without a chaperone; but it was Laura who wore the *écru* bonnet, a fact which Dr. Cartland did

not fail to notice, and "drew in his horns" accordingly. In five days more Laura Grafton would be gone: in the meantime he would only see her once again. There was already too much expectation in the young lady's eye. What did he care for her? Nothing, less than nothing. He talked to her to make Kate jealous; but he was perfectly determined not to get into any entanglement with her. If Kate were single, or a widow, he would make her his wife to-morrow; but there was not another woman on earth besides her whom he would marry.

The flower show over, Dr. Cartland took the ladies to their door, and then bid them "*Au revoir.*"

The next afternoon Kate went for a drive, and left Laura at home to see the doctor, but he never came. This was

repeated the following day with the same result. The third day, when Kate appeared in her hat, Miss Grafton said it was such a lovely afternoon she should enjoy a drive, and accompanied her, feeling very indignant at Dr. Cartland for her two dull, blank afternoons. It so happened that he saw them, unobserved, and immediately drove over and called.

Upon their return they heard of their visitor, and Laura Grafton was dreadfully annoyed.

“How provoking to have missed him,” she cried, “and there’s only to-morrow left. Can’t you do something for me, Kate? I’m sure he will speak if he only has the chance. Couldn’t you just write him a line, you know, and ask him to dinner to-morrow; it’s my last night, you see, and my only chance.”

“ I will write if you wish it, Laura ; shall I say you want to see him ? ”

“ Oh, no, no ! don't mention me ; say you do.”

“ What,” said Kate, with a melancholy attempt at a smile, “ do you expect me to take your sins on my shoulders, when I have so many of my own ? ” But she got up at once and wrote. “ There, Laura, will that answer your purpose ? ” and she handed the letter to her sister-in-law to read ; it ran thus—

“ MY DEAR DR. CARTLAND,—We were sorry to miss you this afternoon when you called, but hope you will join us at dinner to-morrow, and help us to spend Laura's last evening.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ KATE GRAFTON.”

Kate watched her as she read it two or three times over, and wondered that she

ever could have been attached to her—ever could have thought her a nice girl, and good-looking; she settled now that there was nothing in her—she was bad style, had no taste whatever in dress, and what brains and beauty she had she had diligently made use of as a “man trap” during the last month. If a man really loved a woman would he require a whole month’s “drawing on” and encouragement such as Laura Grafton had bestowed daily on Dr. Cartland? Did she not know every trick of her face when in his presence, and did she not despise her for her endeavours to attract?

“Are you quite deaf, Kate? I have spoken to you three times.”

“Why do things always happen thrice?” asked Kate, with a faint laugh. “There must be some magic in the number, I suppose; for I daresay you didn’t raise your

voice, and yet your third call aroused me you see. You have not much to occupy your time, Laura, suppose you write a treatise on the mystic third time."

"When you've done talking nonsense perhaps you will answer my question," said Laura, crossly.

"Let's see, what was it? Something about my infirmities, I think. Oh! you asked if I was deaf, did you not?" and without waiting for an answer, she continued, "No! my beloved sister-in-law, I fear I cannot plead that excuse for my inattention to your interesting remark. I am not deaf. I am only stupid," said Kate, in a bantering tone.

"How do you know my remark was interesting, if you did not hear it, you wise creature?"

"Because whatever falls from the lips of

Laura Grafton is bound to be so, of course ! that was as neatly a turned compliment as you could have got out of Dr. Cartland himself, I think," turning upon her quizzical half closed eyes. " You are not in an agreeable mood, Kate : I asked you, and I believe you heard me, whether you could not press Dr. Cartland a little more to come—your letter might be an invitation to a stranger, instead of a man who is almost a brother to you," and Laura Grafton eyed Kate keenly with no suspicion of her secret, but with wonder at the changeful colour and expression of her face.

It was some time before she received any answer—not till Kate had conquered in the struggle that had been going on in her heart. " Why should she help Laura to marry the man for love of whom she had lost self-respect and peace? Why should

she invite him, that Laura should wring a proposal from him? If she thought it was for his happiness she would cut the heart out of her body; but was this for his happiness?" and then her conscience told her that anything that parted him from her must be for his good, and that battle was won. She raised a pleading, almost humble face to her sister-in-law: "Indeed, I will do my best to make things as you would wish them—don't be afraid, he will be sure to come; but I could not press the matter further, I am sure George would not wish my letter altered."

"As you please," answered Laura, coldly; "only most married women are glad to give a helping hand to the single ones in their little love affairs, but you must do as you please, of course."

A look of pain crossed Kate's face—she

knew the accusation was false and unfounded, but it pained her nevertheless. Might not Laura tell George that she had stood in her light, and he believe her, and George would not like his sister persistently hunting down her game as she had done during the past month, and it was with raised head Kate answered her sister-in-law. "Yes, Laura, I must do as I please in this matter, I cannot write more warmly to Dr. Cartland even to insure your getting him for a husband; but I tell you he will come for all that!" and she arose with the air of a queen and rang the bell, which was quickly answered by a trim little parlour maid: "Jane! tell one of the men to take this to Dr. Cartland's, and wait for an answer," and as the door closed Kate took out her watch.

"It will be at least two hours before you

know your fate, Laura, would you care for a game at Badminton, or would you rather await the issue in your own room? for this one is like the black hole of Calcutta, and we shall be suffocated if we remain here. We must set all the doors and windows open, and make a thorough draught if we are to breathe at all this evening;" and, suiting the action to the word, she pulled up all the blinds and opened every place which would admit fresh air.

"What a whirlwind," cried Laura Grafton; "I must do some of my packing, as I am going away the day after to-morrow!" She turned to Kate, as she spoke, with a faint hope that even at this eleventh hour she might be asked to stay longer; but Kate was stooping over some Gloire and General Jacqueminot roses in a vase, delicately smelling at them by turns to ascertain

which was the most fragrant, and then, as if a sudden thought had seized her, she took one of each colour from the vase, and holding up the Gloire she said, with a heightened colour, and little nervous laugh—

“It is almost *écru*! Will you wear *his* colours still, Laura? and I will mount the red. George always said a red rose was the loveliest flower on God’s earth! Poor old George, I wonder how he is!”

Each girl put her rose into her breast, with a sort of party spirit.

“There!” cried Kate, “the Houses of York and Lancaster over again.”

“Or, if you prefer a more peaceful simile, Kate, we represent the ‘Two Roses,’ but we shall be blown away if we remain here any longer;” and Laura made for her own room.



CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO ROSES.

NO further plan was made between the two, but each held by her “colours,” appeared in them at their tête-à-tête dinner, and resumed them next morning before breakfast; and now Laura’s last evening had arrived, and she was already seated in the drawing-room dressed for dinner; the hand of the clock pointed to five minutes to seven, and the dinner hour was seven o’clock. When she had entered the room, radiant in a blue silk dress trimmed with home-made point, cut into a very low “square,” displaying her ample figure, with necklace and bracelets of turquoise

and gold, and a cluster of "Gloires" in the front of her dress, and another bunch in the *crépé'd* masses of her light hair; Kate looked up.

"Five minutes to seven," exclaimed Laura, "and you have not begun to dress! have you forgotten, Kate, that Dr. Cartland does not like waiting for his dinner? you know he told us so."

"I know he is always punctual, he will be here in four minutes and a half, and I shall not be ready till a quarter past seven. Make the most of your time, Laura, a great deal may be said and done in a quarter of an hour, if you come to the point at once!" And Kate ran out of the room with a more cheerful laugh than Laura had heard for some time.

As the clock struck seven the door bell rang, and in another half minute Dr. Cart-

land was announced. His dark eyes took in the scene at a glance. He even understood the "Gloire" roses! and he seated himself as far as possible from Miss Grafton, after shaking hands with her.

"What did you think of the flower show, Miss Grafton? you don't see such a galaxy of beauty at your country fêtes, I'll warrant."

"Life is very dull in the country, Dr. Cartland. What a draught there is here," getting up and pushing her small lounging chair closer to him, so that she might bring all the guns in her battery to bear upon him. "There, that is better!" and she looked up into his eyes, and did not quite understand the expression she read there; it meant, "I see your game, my lady, and am willing to receive your homage, you are a pretty girl, and you may worship me ;

but if you expect anything serious from me, you are mistaken;" and yet he threw a glance of admiration on her and said, "Much better!" with a quiet laugh.

The colour rose to her cheek at his reply, and she thought the proposal was coming; and she began hastily, "You know, Dr. Cartland, I don't care for the country, I should like my home to be in London," and she lifted her eyes again to his face.

"I should not like the country either; so you see our tastes agree, Miss Grafton!"

"You can't think what a dull life mine is, Dr. Cartland," she went on, her eyes still upturned to his.

"Then what must mine be?" he asked. "You have your father and mother, and no end of brothers and sisters, while I have no one!" and he gave an actual, real sigh, not, as Laura supposed, for her, but for

another, because he daily found life was a void without her.

“You dull!” cried Laura. “Oh! Dr. Cartland, I cannot believe it. Every one says how sought after you are, how much your patients respect you. You cannot be dull, gifted as you are, you know there is hardly a house in London where you would not be welcome.”

“And do you think that is enough to satisfy a man?” he went on, more thinking aloud than speaking to her. “Is a man never to know anything dearer than the world? After all, my life is very blank indeed.”

Surely this was coming to the point. Laura’s heart fluttered with expectation. She must not rouse him from this sentimental mood, how dreamy and how handsome he looked; ten minutes past seven, only five minutes more, she must help him on.

“Blank! Oh, Dr. Cartland! and you have so many to care for you, see how welcome you always are here! is not Kate ever glad to see you? am not I——?”

He awoke from his dream with a start. “Why, good gracious! What has become of Mrs. Grafton? it is nearly a quarter past seven!” Then, after a pause, “You see, in your pleasant company, Miss Grafton, I had almost forgotten the time; but the voice of Nature will be heard, and I have arrived at the conclusion that I am very hungry.”

The door gently opened, and Kate entered the room.

“Better late than never, Mrs. Grafton,” said Dr. Cartland, rising with alacrity to shake hands.

“I am rather late, I own, but I am glad to see you not looking much the worse for the delay.”

“We were getting very impatient, were we not, Miss Grafton?” he said with a smile.

“If I am to tell the truth, Dr. Cartland, I think we were both very contented, and I don’t believe you even thought of the time at all until just before Kate entered the room,” with a triumphant look at her sister-in-law; and then she continued, “it was very naughty of you, Kate, to be late, knowing that Dr. Cartland likes punctuality, but” (shaking her head) “you always are so long beautifying; what makes you so, I can’t think, for that muslin dress would not have taken me three minutes to put on.”

“No!” said Mrs. Grafton, with bewitching, good humoured surprise. “Well! you see it took me exactly twenty minutes, as I told you it would. I left the room at five-

minutes to seven, and appeared like fate inexorably at fifteen minutes past! voilà!" and Kate made a little gesture, dismissing the subject, and accepted Dr. Cartland's right arm in obedience to the dinner bell, while Laura Grafton took the left.

"A thorn between the two roses, Laura," said Kate, leaning forward so as to catch her sister-in-law's eye across Dr. Cartland's stalwart form.

Kate thought he held her hand unnecessarily tight against his arm, under the circumstances. As he had come to propose to Laura, why did he insult her by professing an affection he did not feel? Had not Laura said, meaningly, how happy they had been without her, and he had smiled and not contradicted her! She supposed they had settled it all, to their satisfaction. She had suffered bitterly during those

twenty minutes, but had been able to enter the room with a smile, and as she sat doing the honours of her table Dr. Cartland thought she was lovelier than ever, her eyes lit up by an unusual light, and a brilliant colour born of excitement upon her cheeks. Kate never had been so sparkling and witty before, her blood boiled, was at fever heat.

Dr. Cartland noted each symptom with inward satisfaction. Could she suffer so, unless she loved him with more than the ordinary love of women? That she was suffering he knew. She helped herself to the various dishes as they were handed round, but *he* saw that she merely dallied with them, eating none. He knew that the woman he worshipped was suffering. He sorrowed for her pain, yet exulted in it! Miss Grafton would be gone to-morrow, and then——

Kate looked at her sister-in-law and rose. "I am sorry, Dr. Cartland, we have no one to amuse you."

"What!" he exclaimed, "you surely don't expect me to remain here to be Tommy All-alone! I don't mean to drink any more wine. You can't be barbarous enough to desert me, Mrs. Grafton?"

Kate wanted him to remain behind. She wished to find out if it were all settled; if she had given Laura opportunities enough to "land her fish." She wanted to know the worst, or the best, not being at that moment able to determine which was which. But anything would be better than the agony of uncertainty.

Laura Grafton, however, had no desire to lose sight of her game. She had "stalked" it steadily, and did not wish him to have an hour for reflection, sipping his wine in

moody silence; she merely wanted to take up the thread where it had got tangled before dinner, and wind it up to a satisfactory conclusion, so she gave Kate no time to answer.

“Yes, do come with us, Dr. Cartland, we shall be sure to quarrel if you don’t, or go to sleep talking of the weather, and not be able to rouse up again all the evening, or something dreadful will happen.”

Dr. Cartland needed no further invitation, but followed the ladies at once. They selected their favourite chairs, and sat by the French window, the evening air fanning their cheeks, the conversation was general. Laura wondered how she could get rid of the objectionable third element. If only the length of the room were between them! then they could talk without being heard—in subdued tones.

“Oh, Katie,” she cried, “do sing us something! You don’t want music and lights, like most people. One of those soft songs you often sing in the gloaming will be delicious!”

Kate, clad in white muslin, with crimson roses kissing her snowy neck, floated across the room in the waning light, and began Elaine’s song of “Love and Death.”

“Sweet is true love though given in vain—in vain,
And sweet is death who puts an end to pain :
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.”

“Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be ;
Love, art thou bitter? sweet is death to me ;
Oh! love if death be sweeter—let me die.”

“Sweet love! that seems not made to fade away ;
Sweet death! that seems to make us loveless clay ;
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

“I fain would follow love, if that could be,
I needs must follow death who calls for me ;
Call, and I follow. I follow. Let me die!

As the last notes died away, burning tears fell upon the keys of the piano. She had felt every word of it. How happy she could have been had love been possible, how thankful she would be for death—death to release her from the bonds of wifedom to a man (good though he was) whom she could not love ; to release her from the knowledge of the affection of the man whom she did love, body and soul, heart and life, for another, from her double shame, her double anguish.

“ Let me die ! ” Kate’s voice sounded its agonised lament straight into Dr. Cartland’s heart, where it remained quivering painfully. Music had at all times great power over him, and these low faltering words and notes of Kate Grafton’s sunk deep. The tremulous earnestness told him such a tale of her sadness and her suffering that he was

touched to the quick. His love, his Kate, wished for death ; was weary now, but was it not in his power to make her wish for life again ? His bright darling ! What could she and grim death have to say to each other ? she in her early bloom of girlish womanhood. No ! she should not die, but live for him.

He would with his left arm shield her from the world, and with his right caress every care-mark from her brow. His beautiful Kate ! Thus his eager thoughts chased each other through his brain, while Laura Grafton whispered unheard in his ear.

She was sitting close to him, and he eagerly leaning forward, looking into a bright happy future with Kate, a smile of joy playing upon his lips. Any one might have mistaken the two for happy lovers. Kate, her song of love and death ended,

raised her head, and in the twilight saw it all. With a stifled wail she slid ghost-like from the room. Why should she be a restraint upon them? They were all in all to each other, she but a looker-on at their joy! She could not bear it yet; by-and-by perhaps she might see it unmoved, not now! She had skirted the garden, round by the shady trees and luxuriant shrubs, the magnolias, with their lamp-like flowers, and having gained a bit of tanglewood all moss-grown under foot, she sunk upon the earth, her pure white dress bedabbled with the evening dew.

“Oh! my God!” she cried, “let me die,” and so upon her knees she prayed, “Let me die!” Forgetful of time and space, she lay there prone, a lovely, broken flower, wrestling with her Maker for a boon which could not be granted—yet.

Dr. Cartland heard the wail of Kate's despair, as she left the room, but her flight was lost in the tumult of his own feelings, and he was not aware of her absence. Laura continued her soft talk, and he sat by her absorbed in his own reflections, till aroused by her asking in a raised voice for another song from Kate, and then he became aware that there was no answer. Laura cared nothing for music, but it obliged her to talk in confidential tones, so she liked Kate to sing, but now that she was conscious of her absence, she felt even more glad. She had an open course; she must take the lead, and fly past the winning-post in triumph.

“ Ah !” she exclaimed, “ dear old Kate, she has gone away. I like to see a woman do as she would be done by, don't you, Dr. Cartland ? Now she knew that my last evening with you I should like to have you

all to myself, and," laying her hand upon his arm, and looking with bright eyes into his face, "you know I do, do you not?"

Dr. Cartland saw the pretty, hopeful face very near his own, but had no desire to possess it. He would, perhaps, at any other time have robbed those red lips of a kiss, but to-night there was no room in his thoughts for her. Kate had gained such an ascendancy over him that his mind was full of her image, full and overflowing. At any other time Dr. Cartland would have enjoyed a flirtation with Laura Grafton, taking very good care, however, that no offer to make her his wife should pass his lips, but not to-night. All that was real in the man, all that was earnest, yes, and all that was good, had been called out to-night by his love for Kate. Had she been free to become his wife he would have been a

better man for all his after-life ; for his love for her was the one reality of his artificial existence. But Kate was not free ; she was the wife of his friend. He knew it, but this knowledge had no power now to stop his determination. If she could not be his wife, she loved him, and should be his darling, his companion, the oasis of his life ! With such thoughts it was no pleasure to him to “ spoon ” with Miss Grafton, and for once he put vanity aside.

“ Laura,” he said, “ we have always been friends, and it is a pleasure for me to be with you. Don’t think me impertinent, but, once or twice, I have thought, feared, that you gave me credit for a warmer feeling. I never shall marry, Miss Grafton, unless great improbabilities happen.”

Laura began to cry.

“ Oh ! Dr. Cartland, I thought—— ”

Then throwing up her fair head with an indignant gesture—"Never mind what I thought, but you certainly gave me to understand——" Then with a sigh—"Never mind, it's over now; but tell me one thing, did Kate know of these views of yours?"

"Certainly not. I [have never spoken of my feelings to Mrs. Grafton."

"Then good-night," said Laura. "You will excuse me, Dr. Cartland, but I am going to my own room. I am just a little upset. I don't blame you, you know, but I mistook your friendship for something else. Good-by, Dr. Cartland; think of me sometimes, and tell Kate when she comes back that I'm gone to bed. Don't let her come to me to-night," and Laura Grafton left the room, and rushed upstairs, shedding tears of rage and disappointment over her crushed hopes and fruitless endeavours.

Dr. Cartland waited impatiently for Kate's return; every moment seemed an hour. At last he could bear the silence, the quietness, the inaction no longer, and stepped out into the night. One star looked him in the face, glittering brightly—that was Kate, the one bright spot, the one pure feeling of his heart. What could have become of her? He wandered on unconsciously, taking the path she had trod an hour before. He entered the tanglewood which Kate often laughingly called her “wilderness,” and stopped. What was that white and glimmering on the dark ground? His heart beat quickly, his breath came heavily, his instinct told him that it was Kate. But why, in God's name, was she lying there so motionless? Was he too late?

“Let me die!” Her last words rang

through his brain painfully. Was she dead? Had God heard and answered her prayer? He rushed forward and prostrated himself upon the ground beside the still, white figure, and repeated her name again and again in an agonised appeal.

“Kate, Kate, my heart’s one idol—Kate, my own and only darling, live for me! do not leave me, darling. Oh! Kate, Kate, you shall never leave me again!”

He drew her to his breast. How cold she was, how wan, but she was not dead, she was his own, his very own. He sat upon the damp ground with Kate in his arms, the moon shone out upon their love, and Kate opened her large dark eyes with a glorified expression, looking up into the passion-pleading face bent over her.

“You love me, darling,” he murmured, holding her cold hands in his.

“I love you—God knows I love you, love!” she answered, solemnly, for which assurance he rained eager kisses upon her upturned face. “Dr. Cartland,” she whispered, “are you not going to marry Laura?” and even at the thought her features were distorted by pain.

“Marry Laura!” he repeated after her. “My little Kate, how can you mock me? Don’t you know that my life is yours. I would give up every earthly wish for you. I am not a religious man, as you know; in fact I think my Kate one day called me an unbeliever, so I have no fear of after-punishment, to take away from my happiness; but I am not an unbeliever, for I believe in you, my heart’s darling.” Then, after a pause, Kate lying happily passive in his arms, he looked up. “As I said before, darling, I don’t believe in much, and I certainly don’t

kneel down each day to ask for daily bread, and yet when I saw you lying there in your white dress, with your dear pale face, I have an idea that I called upon His name. Kate! somehow you open a higher life to me; help me from myself, darling, teach me to be pure and good like you."

Kate trembled.

"How happy we should have been, Dr. Cartland."

"Should have been, my love—shall be, you mean. Kate, we will never part again. Come home and be more to me than wife."

Wife! That name recalled her. His wife she could never be. Come home! her heart bounded wildly at the invitation, how she longed to make her home upon his breast! But at the word "Wife," George's

face arose before her pale and stern, and she gave a cry of pain.

“Dr. Cartland, spare me—spare George. You know I cannot be your wife. I am his.”

“Hush, hush, my love,” he whispered, soothingly. “You are mine now, you have given yourself to me, you are not his! Not my wife? Why, Kate, what does that word convey to you? A foolish promise, rashly spoken by a young and inexperienced girl, or the true love of a noble woman’s heart? My little Kate, which makes a woman most a wife? Love, or a promise which it is more sinful to keep than to break? Kate, you are mine! If there be a God, I claim you before Him—to come to me—yes! to be mine for ever.”

She was carried away by his words,

by his will, by their joint love. She trembled in his embrace, and yet crept closer.

“Come, Kate! yes, now!” and he rose with difficulty, his burden in his arms.

“Put me down,” she begged, “I want to speak to you.”

He placed her on her feet. How stiff and numb she was! and away from his warmth, how cold!

“Dr. Cartland,” she whispered, “how can I go, with Laura here?”

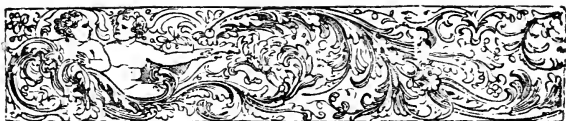
“True,” he answered, “I had forgotten her. To-morrow, love, I will come for you.”

“And you never loved her?” asked Kate, looking in his face earnestly.

“Never, Kate; I have never cared for any woman in my life, except you—never shall—you are my one love,” and he drew her

to him passionately, and then, "how cold you are, my little one, selfish that I have been to keep you standing, with this thin dress, in the night air. To-morrow, love! Oh, how you shiver! Good-night, sweetheart. Good-night!"





CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY.

MISS PERKINS had sat a great deal at her window lately, she was still there watching the passers by, and ever and anon casting a hasty glance at the gate which faced her own, and at the peep of rose-clad house between the trees. "The drawing-room blind has not been up since Saturday, and that man's carriage has never been once at the door since Friday. Something very unusual must be going on, and yet I have never heard a whisper." Miss Perkins got a little weary of her "sentry-go," so set up a book to help away the time, and getting engrossed by it, almost

left off her occupation of spider, till the stopping of wheels opposite brought her suddenly back from fiction to every-day life, and stern facts.

“ Good heavens ! ” shrieked the small old maid, “ A hearse ! Then some one is dead there, and that is why the blinds are down. Who can it be ? I must find out.” But just as she was retreating from the window, her attention was arrested again by the movements outside, and to her surprise, instead of a coffin being brought from the house, the doors of the hearse were opened and a magnificent coffin of polished oak, richly ornamented with silver devices and inscription plate, was drawn forth, and it was evident that it was not empty, for the two men who bore it staggered under its weight. Several frightened white-faced servants were now upon the scene. Miss

Perkins opened the window and listened. The parlour-maid was addressing one of the carriers.

“But who told you to bring that here?” said the girl. “We were not expecting anything of that sort, and oh, it’s dreadful!”

“Here’s my directions,” said the man roughly, handing her a written paper. “‘Mrs. Grafton, Hazelhurst House, Hazelhurst,’ and here I must leave her.”

“Her,” cried the girl, “who is it?”

“Can’t say,” replied the man doggedly.

“Do you mean you don’t know?” persisted the girl.

“I never knows nothing, but what I am told, and the gent, he gives me this, and says, ‘drive the party inside to that address, and say as I am coming down to make all necessary arrangements this afternoon.’”

“ Yes !” said she, “ but who *is* the gent ?”

“ Well, I suppose you will know him when you sees him, Miss ; but if you was to ask questions from now till the day of judgment, I couldn’t tell you.”

The other servants had listened to the conversation, and a happy thought struck the coachman—

“ Well, I suppose you know where you brought the body from ?” he said, with an air of authority.

“ London.”

“ London ! eh ? but you see, mister, London’s a large place, what street may it have been, now ?”

“ Can’t say—didn’t look at the name—it was early—hardly light when the gent knocked at my door and asked if I wanted a job, and when I said ‘ Yes,’ he said I was

to put two 'osses into a 'earse at once ; and when I was ready I got on to my box, and up he jumped beside me."

"With you?" cried all the servants, in a breath.

"On the box with me," answered the man solemnly. "His orders was, drive straight on till I tell you to stop ; and I did. It was almost dark, and I didn't notice no-think partikler. All at once he calls out for me to stop, and I stopped ; and then he opens the door with a key, and he goes upstairs, and then I see a woman who looked scared like, and I thought she was a-goin' to talk to me ; but just then he says, 'come up,' and me and my mate went up, and he desired me to take charge of that" (pointing to the coffin, now half out of the hearse, half in), "and he give me this address, and paid me handsome, and if you was

to keep me talking all day I couldn't tell you no more."

"I don't think we had better take it in," remarked the cook, who was very nervous and frightened.

"You see we haven't received no orders. 'Couldn't you leave it at the 'Green Man' till we know, sir?" asked the housemaid.

"No! I couldn't," answered the man sharply. "My orders was to leave it here—are you ready Tom?" turning to his mate. "If you wont take it in I'll leave it on the doorstep—time is money to me—I'm in a hurry."

And the men carried the coffin to the steps and put it down.

"Will you take it in, or no?" said the undertaker; "it seems rather indecent like to leave a body out here in the hot sun."

While he was speaking the servants had

noticed the plate on the coffin, and were now gathered round reading it.

The parlour maid shrieked, "Oh! look, look, it's missus herself!"

"Nonsense," said the coachman, sharply, "I drove the missus and Miss Grafton to the station myself on Saturday, it can't be her." And then he read aloud, "Katharine Grafton, wife of George Grafton, Esquire, Hazelhurst House, Hazelhurst, died September 3rd, 187—, aged 20."

"Shall we go in?" inquired the undertaker. "You seem to know the lady."

"Yes, go in," said the coachman. "Know her! ay, I should think we did, she was the prettiest lady as ever you set eyes on, and as good a mistress as ever lived. When my child died last winter she was very kind to me and my good woman. You should have seen her sitting in her handsome

dresses nursing that child. Yes, he died in her arms, died hard of convulsions, poor little fellow, and then she spoke like a sister to my wife, she did. She paid for the funeral, and a handsome one it was. We've lost a good friend in Mrs. Grafton!" and the man rubbed his coat-sleeve across his eyes. The women were all crying, for they were attached to their mistress. All at once they perceived another figure among them—a man dressed in deep black—evidently dreadfully agitated, with a pale set face.

"Oh, I am glad you are come, sir," said the parlour-maid, "if anything could gladden one at such a time. Oh! sir, is it not dreadful? my poor missus." And the girl began to sob heartily.

"For God's sake get her into the house; don't stand here for the neighbours to gape at!"

And without another word Mrs. Grafton's coffin was carried into the house, from whence only the Saturday before she had walked out at the same door, with a smile upon her lips, in the prime of her youth and beauty.

Dr. Cartland attended to everything, ordered the funeral, saw the clergyman, wrote to Dr. Grafton, wrote to Miss Ansell, wrote to George. He did not telegraph to him, of what use could it be? He could not possibly be home for the funeral; details could be better told in a letter, at the best of times telegrams are unsatisfactory things.

Dr. Cartland did not remain at the house, but came down every day; that is, he came on the two intervening days before the funeral took place.

Mrs. Grafton was brought home on the

Wednesday, and on the Saturday she was to be buried.

On the Friday Miss Ansell arrived. She had come to see her niece once more, and to follow her to her last resting-place. Dr. and Mrs. Grafton had come also.

Miss Ansell directed one of the servants to take her to the room where the body of her niece lay. She walked with a firm step; stiffer than ever in appearance, harder in face, no emotion was visible in her cold grey eyes.

The coffin was covered with wreaths of lovely hot-house flowers, placed upon it by friendly hands. The sight of them did not please Miss Ansell.

She beckoned to the maid. "Remove that rubbish and open the coffin!"

"Open the coffin!" repeated the girl in a hushed voice. "Lor, Miss, it's screwed down!"

“When was it screwed down?” asked Miss Ansell.

“Oh! how do I know, mum—Miss—I beg your pardon. Before she was brought home, poor dear! and only to think that master, who loved her so, should be abroad and know nothing about it.”

“Who has seen Mrs. Grafton since she died?” and Miss Ansell fixed her eyes sternly upon the girl.

“Why, Dr. Cartland, ma’am. He gave the certificate of her death, I believe, and she died of inflammation of the lungs, which carried her off quite sudden.”

Miss Ansell grew more rigid and stiff at every word.

“Who else has seen her?” she asked.

“No one that I am aware of. The doctor——”

“I don’t want to hear any more about

the doctor, girl ; tell me all *you* know about your mistress since Mr. Grafton left !”

“ Well, Miss, after master went away, Mrs. Grafton seemed to fret very much. She stayed indoors, and she got to look very pale, and then Dr. Cartland came to call.”

“ When was that ?” interrupted Miss Ansell.

“ That was a week or ten days after master went away. Dr. Cartland came two or three times.”

“ What did he come for ? Was my niece ill ?”

“ Yes ! master had put missus into Dr. Cartland’s hands to doctor, for I heard him talking to him in the passage the last time they met, and he said to the doctor, “ Harry, take care of her as if she were your own sister. I don’t like the look of her at all—poor

Kate! she has grown pale and thin," and then Dr. Cartland asked if there was any consumption in the family, but I didn't hear master's answer, for I had passed out of ear-shot.

"Well, Miss, to go on with my story: Miss Grafton then came and stayed a month, and we all thought as how the doctor was sweet upon her, for they used to sit and whisper like, and poor missus she mostwise sat apart at her work, and looked low and forsook like. Dr. Cartland was here last on Friday—I mean before she died—it was Miss Grafton's last night, and she and the doctor sat together till late, and missus went out in the garden alone. When she came in she was as white as marble, and as cold. I went up to her room and asked her to have something hot, but she wouldn't. She asked where Miss Grafton was, and I went to see if she was

in the drawing-room, but she had gone to bed, and I went back to tell missus and found her all of a shiver. She said she had been sitting out in the garden with nothing on, and had caught cold. I went and got her a hot bottle, for her feet were like stones, and she thanked me and seemed glad of it. I called her next morning, and she was feverish, and said she had a pain in all her limbs, and she coughed. She said if it had not been Miss Grafton's last morning, she would have breakfasted in bed, but she had promised to go up to London with her and see her off at Paddington. At eleven o'clock they started off in the carriage. Missus seemed more herself, and turned round and asked me to order something nice for her dinner, as she had not time to see about it, and I did. I ordered her as pretty a little dinner for one as you

would wish to see, but she didn't come back. She telegraphed to cook to say she was not feeling well, and so should remain in London with friends for a day or two. And the next we heard of her, Miss," and Mary wiped her eyes on the corner of her white apron—"the next we heard of her was when they brought her home like that!" and the girl pointed to the coffin.

"What was the undertaker's name?" asked Miss Ansell.

"The undertaker's name here is Winters, Miss. I don't know the name of the man who brought her from London."

"What! you didn't take his name and address?"

"No, Miss! we were just questioning him when Dr. Cartland came, and the man went away."

"Go! and give my compliments to Dr.

Grafton, girl, and say I wish to speak to him here ;” and Mary went eagerly, glad to escape Miss Ansell’s questionings and stern looks.

When the old lady found herself alone, she passed her hand quickly across her forehead as if to clear away the clouds from her conscience.

“I must do my duty,” she muttered. “She is, or she is not, in that coffin. It must be my duty to clear up the mystery, even though it bring a scandal on my own family, no matter what comes of it; Maria Ansell must do her duty.”

And she turned her back upon the dead woman, and watched with a flinty face for the opening of the door.

Dr. Grafton was rather afraid of the stern spinster, and obeyed her command at once. He had been fond of his daughter-in-law, and regretted her sudden death, both for

her sake and for the sake of the son who was in a foreign land, unknowing the loss he had sustained of the wife he so dearly loved. He was, as I said, afraid of Miss Ansell; but he was quite unprepared for what she had to say to him. The semaphore-like arms pointed to a vacant chair, and then she seated herself so as to look him full in the face.

“Dr. Grafton,” she said, “as a man of honour and a Christian, are you doing your duty?”

“My duty,” stuttered the little man, “with reference to what? Believe me, I never willingly neglect my duty, but I am at a loss to understand you.”

“Then of course you have ascertained where your daughter-in-law died, and you have convinced yourself that she is dead; you can answer for it that she has not been *murdered*! In fact, Dr. Grafton, you have, of

course, identified her body, and have had a post-mortem examination of the same !”

The little man got very pale, and sprang from his chair in great agitation.

“ Surely, surely, madam, you cannot for one moment imagine that there has been any foul play, it is impossible ! simply impossible !” and he sank down again dejectedly in his seat, as a bottle of soda-water after the first fizz and splutter subsides.

Miss Ansell continued, mercilessly pointing with a long bony finger to the coffin.

“ I repeat, have you identified her ?”

“ I—I—no ! I can’t say I have. I never thought of what seems to me so unheard of—I—I—might even say so *indecent*—a proceeding as re-opening a coffin, unless there were grounds for suspicion.”

“ Tut, tut,” interrupted Miss Ansell, impatiently ; “ perhaps it’s filled with bricks !”

“Madam,” cried Dr. Grafton, “remember she was my son’s wife!”

“Perhaps,” continued Miss Ansell, waiving him into silence—“perhaps you will find her with her throat cut!”

“Good God!” cried the unfortunate man, beads of perspiration starting out upon his clammy brow. “Who? who, I say, could wish to injure such a sweet woman as Kate? No! no! the thing’s absurd—unheard of. Kate could have had no enemies, and we have Dr. Cartland’s certificate of her death. You must have forgotten this, Miss Ansell.”

“I have forgotten nothing, sir,” said that lady, stiffly; “but Dr. Cartland may be the greatest villain unhung, for all I know of him; he may have murdered the girl himself.”

Dr. Grafton smiled.

“I can assure you Dr. Cartland is thought

very highly of in his profession. I do not for a moment think he would give a false certificate ; nor do I believe he had any grudge against Kate. Why, they were the best of friends, George, Kate, Cartland and all. No, no ! Miss Ansell, we may leave the poor child at peace. Laura tells me she had a fearful cough. I, as a medical man, can assure you that inflammation of the lungs often kills very quickly. Poor Kate ! She was a sweet young woman, and my son will lose a good wife in her."

Miss Ansell looked at him steadily, and then spoke, "I believe you are only a fool, Dr. Grafton, though your conduct might be taken for that of a knave. I mean to have this coffin opened to-night. If she be in it, there must be medical opinion as to whether she died by fair means ; and, if there be any uncertainty upon the subject, I mean to

have a 'post-mortem.' Now, I am going to see the clergyman and the magistrate about it. You will find I can do my duty. I wish you good-day, sir!" And Miss Ansell stalked out of the room.

Dr. Grafton rose too, but only to go over to the coffin. He gently smoothed the flowers with his hand. "My poor girl," he murmured, "if I thought for one moment that any one had done you a wrong, I would let them disturb you even now; but who should want to injure you, my little Kate?" and something very like a tear fell upon the white blossoms. "Before Heaven, I swear, I would avenge you, child," continued the old man, "if I thought that any one had harmed a hair of your head, but I do not; and why should I subject you to scandal and gossip in your grave. I must try and stop this strong-minded old woman

from her purpose;" and he turned, and quitted the room.

But Miss Ansell was not to be stopped, she had already left the house when Dr. Grafton went to seek her; and she succeeded in alarming the clergyman and the magistrate; and before daylight waned, all concerned were in Kate Grafton's room waiting painfully while the undertaker, with a grating sound, unturned the screws, and did the needful work, so that the dead woman might again be brought into the light of day.

Dr. Cartland was present, and, by his wish, Kate's maid. Eager, anxious faces watched to see the occupant of the narrow house. Dr. Cartland was pale as the face which was revealed to them, when the lid was at last raised; but he was quiet and calm, and very unlike a man who is about to look upon the

woman he has murdered. Every one, almost involuntarily glanced at him. He neither sought, nor shunned their gaze; but after looking for some time at the face of the dead, he said—

“She is sadly altered since I saw her last; so she will hardly be recognisable to you, Dr. Grafton.”

The father-in-law gazed earnestly at the corpse. “She *is* altered, but the features are the same. Yes! it is my daughter-in-law; but how much older she looks, and how disfigured!”

“Yes,” said Dr. Cartland, “when people die in a full habit of body they very quickly change.” There was an almost imperceptible tone of relief in his voice, as he continued, “I am glad you are satisfied, Dr. Grafton, that I have not deceived you.”

“I never, for one moment, supposed you

had, Dr. Cartland," said the elder man, grasping the hand of the other. "This investigation has been entirely at the wish of, and to satisfy, Miss Ansell, who I hope *is* satisfied now."

"I would not swear to that's being my niece," she answered, stiffly. "She is strangely altered if her death was a natural one."

Mrs. George Grafton's maid here looked up eagerly, "I could identify my mistress, if I might be allowed to raise her sleeve just above the wrist, there will be a scratch. I did it myself, putting her skirt over her head, only a few days ago, there was a pin in the dress. I did not notice it. Mrs. Grafton was very kind, and only laughed, and said, I had spoilt her beauty, and she must wear long sleeves till it was well; but she straightway put on a white muslin with

open ones, which showed the scratch, which looked red and sore."

Miss Ansell at once stepped forward.

"Which arm?" she asked.

"The left, ma'am."

And in another moment, the arm lay bared. Death's discoloration was upon it, but there was also a scar like the one the girl spoke of.

"I will swear to that," said the girl.

"Yes, that is my poor dear mistress!"

Dr. Cartland turned to Miss Ansell, "Are you satisfied now? I trust so, for my friend, George Grafton's sake; these investigations are most painful to *me*. He would not, I am sure, like his dead wife to be subjected to further inspection," and he gently closed one of the coffin lids.

"You are right, Cartland," said Dr. Grafton.

The clergyman and magistrate had remained silent spectators of the scene; they now both advanced, with kind words of regret for the dead woman; but said they were thankful that there was no ground for suspicion.

But they were soon interrupted by the stern old maid, "I am the only living relation of Mrs. George Grafton; this investigation has only satisfied me that she is dead; the next question is, how she came by her death? I must insist on a post-mortem examination!"

In vain every one argued with her. She had her own way, and the examination took place the next morning before the proper authorities; and it was decided, without doubt, that George Grafton's wife had died of inflammation of the lungs; and there was nothing left to do, but to transplant

her into "God's Acre." And even Miss Ansell was satisfied that every one had done their duty, and that Kate's death was a plain fact, and no mystery, after all.





CHAPTER VI.

B E R Y L C H A N T L E R.

AMONG the passengers bound for Ceylon were a Mr. and Mrs. Chantler and their daughter, a young girl of fifteen years old, a fragile, fairy-like little creature, very childish for her age, shrinking from even the most common-place acquaintance with her fellow-travellers on board the "May Queen." Beryl Chantler loved her parents with the passionate devotion which is felt sometimes by an only child, who has no brothers or sisters to share his or her heart amongst. Beryl had no room in hers for any image save those two, who filled it to overflowing.

A sincere friendship grew up between Mr. Chantler and George Grafton. They had both lost their money from the failure of coffee crops, both were on their way to try and retrieve their fortunes, but Mr. Chantler had harder work before him than George Grafton. He had bought his coffee plantation from another man, knowing nothing about it himself, and found he had made a bad bargain—had, in fact, been taken in. And now he had made up his mind to settle in Ceylon, and work the plantation himself, when he should have learnt to do so; whereas George only meant to put things straight, and then return to his home, and his wife, whose image he kept green in his heart. He had promised to help Mr. Chantler too, and put him in the right way of working his property, and both men were standing on deck

with hopeful hearts, not more than a couple of days' journey from their destination. They were talking cheerfully of their future, when the captain's voice broke in upon them.

"We shall have an ugly night, gentlemen. Do you see the golden rim round the moon? A storm is not many hours off, I'll warrant."

The elements rose slowly but surely. Black clouds banked the moon in until it was hidden utterly in the darkness of the night, but still the "May Queen" kept on her course, and the captain stuck to his post like a man. But suddenly in the blackness they heard his voice—

"Good God! there is a light on our right. We are out of our course. If that should prove to be the Maldivé Islands we are lost!"

He was speaking to his first lieutenant,

but before he had time to issue any orders they struck suddenly on the rocks, and the good ship shivered from stem to stern with the knowledge of her doom. The fires were quickly put out by the rushing, rapidly-increasing water. The captain was calm and collected. He ordered the boats to be lowered; he called on all men on board to help to save life, for the good "May Queen" would sink more suddenly than they were aware. He told them he should stick to the old craft and share her doom, with just a quiver in his voice, as he remembered the dear ones who would await his return in vain. He ordered torches to be lighted, and by their glare they saw with dismay that no boat could live in such a sea, upon which he desired rafts to be constructed, and upon them many of the passengers were launched upon the angry ocean, while others,

refusing to believe in the extreme danger of the ship, preferred remaining on board, and many persisted in getting into the boats, which upset at once, adding to the horror of the scene by the shrieks of the struggling, drowning wretches. The large raft had been launched with its freight of human lives. There had been a fearful struggle for places on it, in which George and the Chantlers had taken no part. They were still upon the deck of the "May Queen." The captain had watched off the raft, when his eyes fell on the little group.

"Mr. Chantler," he cried, "why did you not go on the raft? She will ride the waves in safety."

"We are three," he answered. "Three. It was a case of every man for himself. How they fought for a place! like demons let loose."

“By my word!” said the captain, “this lily blossom shall not perish if I can help it,” taking Beryl by the hand. “Miss Beryl, I have a daughter too, a fair girl like you; kiss me for her sake, child. I shall never see her sweet face again!”

Beryl Chantler, usually so shy, seemed undaunted by the danger, and looking up in the captain's torch-lit face, she saw the tears he was shedding for his child, and straightway went and put her arms about his neck, and kissed him. Her parents had moved some distance off, so as not to intrude upon his grief. George Grafton had not heard these words. He was just coming up with some spars attached to some ropes which he held in his hand, when the “May Queen” lurched head foremost into the water; but George Grafton, Beryl Chantler, and the captain were not yet engulfed. George

seized the girl in his arms, and with the seaman's help attached her to the spars which they had hurriedly lashed together. In the excitement Beryl was mercifully spared the knowledge of her parent's fate.

"Go with her," cried the captain; "for the love of God be quick!" and George was, with a few masterly knots, secured to the little raft with Beryl Chantler for his companion. He held the girl's hands for sympathy, and to help her face the death which he doubted not was to be their joint portion. The captain, and a few of the sailors who stood by him, launched them safely, and the girl clung silently to the hand she held. Once she tried to pierce the darkness, and asked George where her parents were, and he had answered her—

"They are safe, dear child!" upon which she had become contented.

They heard the captain's voice now at a little distance, calling out to George to take care of her, and then there came a mighty rush as the waters overwhelmed the "May Queen."

Day was beginning to break, and the two passengers on that little raft looked around to see who else had been saved besides themselves, but they were so small, and the waves so high, that they could discern nothing; the wind had gone down, but the sea was troubled still. The sun arose, and beat upon them, mercilessly, and they soon suffered acutely from thirst. The sea was like a millpond now, as the sun was about to set, when all at once George heard a sound that made his heart leap for joy. He could plainly distinguish the oscillation of paddle-wheels, or a screw; and in due time a steamer came in sight of them, and was

within hail. Her captain seemed to be on the look-out for them, for he had stopped and lowered a boat. Kind hands soon extricated both Beryl and George from their cramped and painful position, and had lifted them into the boat. The poor girl, who had kept up a brave heart through all the dangers of that dreadful night and day, was now ready to faint at the reaction, when the strain was taken off. She heard the officer in command telling George how they had rescued a number of those who had left the wreck on the raft, and her eager eyes sought the steamer's deck, to try and discover those she loved among the watchers' faces. She was too exhausted to remember whether her parents had gone on the raft or no. She knew George had said "they were safe," and she concluded that they had been picked up like the others. In this belief she

managed, with help, to get on board the steamer, and then, when the little band of saved ones pressed around to welcome her, she faintly asked if her parents were among them; and upon hearing the answer, fell senseless on the deck.

George was by her in a second, and also the young officer who had come to the rescue, who, if truth must be told, had fallen in love with the fragile girl at first sight, perhaps because she was so young, and fair and delicate-looking, while he, with his bronzed face and powerful frame, looked to belong to another world. George essayed to lift her, but he was worn out, and the young sailor pressed eagerly forward.

“You are tired, sir, let me carry your—this lady—to my cabin!” and without another word he descended with his burthen between decks, followed by George; and

Beryl was laid upon the sailor's little bed. He gazed long upon that lily face, and then turned abruptly to George. "Is she your sister, sir?"

"No," he answered, with a smile at the young man's eagerness.

"No? surely she is not your *wife*?"

George laughed out.

"The young lady is Miss Beryl Chantler, aged fifteen. Her parents—God rest them!—were drowned last night. I am, as far as I know, her only friend on earth, and I shall take her home as a present to my wife, as soon as my work at Ceylon is done."

Charles Summers gave a sigh of relief, if such a powerful noise coming from so brawny a chest could be called by that name. This, then, was no rival, he thought; and he fell to looking again at the inanimate little face upon his pillow.

“What is your name?” asked George.

“Summers — Charles Summers. And yours?”

“Grafton,” answered George. “And now, Mr. Summers, can you find a doctor? or if you have not one on board, be good enough to bring some brandy.”

“You don’t think Miss Chantler is very ill, do you, Mr. Grafton? We have no doctor on board. You see, we have come for a cargo here, not with passengers, but I can get you plenty of brandy, and the captain has a medicine chest.”

“Never mind medicine, it is exhaustion. We must try and get her round, and then give her some food. She is famished, poor girl. Look sharp, my good fellow, you can gaze when you come back,” and the sailor rushed off, and soon came back laden with

the brandy and the best food he could procure for Beryl.

It was a strange sight, those two strong men bending over the pale, childish form, rubbing brandy upon her hands, and feet, and brow—putting bird-like sips between her lips. Soon their efforts were crowned with success. Beryl Chantler opened her eyes; she looked at Charles Summers, but did not remember him, and then she looked at George, and said—

“Oh! Mr. Grafton, tell me the truth—are my parents safe? You told me they were safe.”

George took her hand in his.

“Little Beryl! I will be your friend as long as I live. You will soon love my wife, and be happy with her.”

“But my parents,” she cried, “are *they* safe?”

“ Yes, Beryl ; safe from all further sorrow and trouble ; safe from disappointment and care. Together, and at rest, ‘ safe in the arms of Jesus ! ’ looking down with loving eyes upon their child, telling her to keep up a brave heart, to be a good woman, and to join them in their happy home hereafter.”

A spasm shot through the girl’s blue eyes, the dilated pupils looked at George with a vague horror for a moment, and then she burst into an agony of tears.

“ Father ! Mother ! come back to me ! don’t leave me alone ! come back, I have no one but you ! oh, mother ! mother ! ”

George drew the girl close to him, but did not by words interrupt her passion of grief. He judged rightly, it was best over, that tears would bring relief, the storm be followed by a calm. It was Beryl’s first trouble !

George Grafton was as good as his word, he was a friend indeed to the orphan girl. Directly they landed at Ceylon, he made a home for her. At first, he was going to put her to board in a family; but she entreated him not to send her among strangers. So he got his overseer's wife to live at his house, and take care of Beryl, and the girl repaid him by the devotion of a dog, would follow him for hours, or sit by him silently, ever on the watch for his least whim or wish. George was always kind to Beryl Chantler, but his love for his wife was too great for him to notice the girl's affection for him, if he thought of it at all, he considered it only natural she should be fond of the man who had been her parent's friend. But Beryl felt more than this. The deep devotion of her nature had belonged to her parents while they lived; and

now that they were dead, they were still beloved, but youth needs more than a memory to cling to, and Beryl had set up George in her heart as an idol to be worshipped, without once thinking that such a love and worship would be wrong. She believed him to be perfect, and she would have given her life to save him from one pang of sorrow. Such a love as Elaine in her gentleness gave to Launcelot, Beryl Chantler bestowed on George Grafton. He, like Launcelot, had given his heart to another; and dreamed not of the love he had awakened. So time wore on, and Beryl was almost happy even without her parents, being near him; seeing his face, hearing his voice.

George found his plantation was not in the bad condition he had supposed; good news, indeed, to him, when he was daily

and hourly longing to be back in that pretty, peaceful home at Hazelhurst, where he pictured his wife in her floating white muslins, relieved, as was her wont, with some crimson flower. He had received one or two letters from her, friendly, affectionate letters, such as might have come from a loving sister to a valued brother. But George, never suspicious, failed to miss the ring of the true metal of wifely love.

It was a fortnight now since he had heard, and he was sitting silently with Kate's last letter in his hand, he had read it often and often and been cheered by it, but, somehow, to-day his spirits were at zero; and the well-read note failed to rouse him out of himself. He did not even see Beryl who sat watching him almost hidden among the folds of the curtains.

"I cannot bear it," he murmured; "I

wish I had never left my darling! how do I know what ill may befall her? and how she begged me not to go! Kate! Kate! what presentiment of evil is upon me? I had an offer for the plantation to-day. Shall I take it? We should not be rich, but we should have enough for a dinner of herbs, and contentment would make a good sauce to accompany it, and you would never reproach me for poverty, I know, dear Kate."

So intent was he upon his thoughts that he failed to notice the entrance of a servant with letters, but when he saw them, he rushed eagerly at them, and scanned the writing of each hastily till he came to the last.

"None from Kate," he cried, and sunk despondingly down in his chair again, no longer in a hurry to open them, but presently there came into his mind a vague

idea of black borders, and he turned once more to the letters. His father's writing was the first to greet him; his letter was kind and consolatory, offering George the deepest sympathy in his trial, speaking with loving regret of poor Kate, and saying how unspeakably shocked they had all been at her sudden death, and ending by mentioning the care and kindness Dr. Cartland had shown her in her illness.

A deadly pallor overspread his face as he read, a deep groan escaped his lips, but he uttered no word.

Beryl saw his anguish, and with nervous, clasping hands, watched him, afraid to move; afraid to interrupt his grief, whatever it might be—fearing to seem to pry into it if she moved near, or offered her sympathy—watching his face with the expression of dumb compassion, and sym-
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thetic sorrow which a faithful dog would have for his beloved master.

George next opened a letter from Miss Ansell, announcing her niece's sudden death ; and telling him that, having considered it open to suspicion, she had deemed it her duty to have it properly investigated, but she was glad to be able to inform him that Kate had died from natural causes. She expressed no sorrow for her niece's death, or regret for her husband's sufferings, but begged him to humble himself under the Lord's chastening hand, lest worse evil might befall him !

"Worse evil !" he thought ; "what worse evil could come to him than losing the wife he had loved so dearly ?" and he tossed Miss Ansell's letter from him with disgust.

The next, which was from Dr. Cartland, must be given verbatim :—

“MY DEAR GEORGE,—This letter must needs be very painful to me to write, and to you to read, though I know your pain must exceed what is felt by me or any one else. I had better give you a detailed account of your dear wife’s last illness, and subsequent death. I did not see Mrs. Grafton for some time after you left. I did not like to intrude upon her natural regret at your absence. When I called she told me Miss Grafton was coming to stay with her, which I was glad to hear, as she seemed low and out of spirits. I was often at your house during your sister’s visit. Mrs. Grafton did not seem well or lively as she used to be. Then, after a month’s stay, Miss Grafton left, and your wife went to London to see her off. I did not know that she intended to do so, and went to the station to see if I could be of any use to your

sister. I was very much shocked at the change in Mrs. Grafton, and she coughed distressingly—her cheeks were flushed, her lips parched. Miss Grafton and I both said how sorry we were she had attempted the journey, but she said it was nothing, at least, only a cold she had caught going into the garden the evening before—she should be all right in a day or two. We had not much time to spare before Miss Grafton was in the train and steaming from the platform, then I took Mrs. Grafton to my carriage, which was waiting. I noticed her breathing, and felt her pulse, and saw at once the only chance of saving her was to get her to bed immediately, so without even asking her leave, I drove her to a respectable lodging I knew of, and persuaded her to come in. She was inclined to be angry with me at first, but was too ill to raise

many objections. I proposed sending for another medical man, but she would not hear of it. Of what use to go through the sad details? I telegraphed, in her name, to her servants, not to expect her home.

“My dear George, I could not save her! I called in another medical man when I found she was getting rapidly worse. She could not speak when he arrived, and very shortly afterwards she died of simple suffocation from inflammation of the lungs. I did what I thought you would wish in the ordering of her coffin, and having done so I hired a hearse and had her taken to her home. I arrived there about the same time, and was annoyed to find an unseemly discussion going on as to whether your servants would take in the coffin—they all seemed afraid of their own shadows. I

wrote at once to Dr. Grafton and Miss Ansell, and made all arrangements for the funeral. I grieve to tell you Miss Ansell made herself very objectionable, protesting that she believed her niece had been murdered, and that she should do her duty—and she did it, if re-opening your wife's coffin in the presence of witnesses, and a post-mortem examination, was her duty.

“I need hardly tell you all this has occasioned much Hazelhurst talk, and I did all I could to prevent it. But Miss Ansell pointed at *me* as the murderer of her niece, so I could do and say no more. I think you know George how sincerely fond I was of Mrs. Grafton, and that her loss would make a terrible blank in the life of a man who has no “kith and kin,” has many acquaintances, but makes few friends. Miss Ansell is now satisfied that the only mystery

was the death itself, which poor dear Kate has gone to solve. You know, my dear fellow, how truly sorry I am for you.—

With kind regards, your sincere friend,

“H. CARTLAND.”

George read the letter through like a man in a dream, and then covered his face with his hands in the vain endeavour to shut out the ghastly truth—that Kate was dead and buried. The horrible spectacle of the post-mortem examination came before him—the gossip that had followed. She had died alone, no friend of her own sex with her; no one but Cartland. “Oh, God, help me to bear it!” he cried out in the agony of his mind.

Beryl heard the words, and could no longer keep away from his side. He started when she laid her tiny hand on his. It

took his fancy, even in his grief, that she looked like a ministering angel, standing beside him dressed in soft pure white.

"Let me help you, dear," she pleaded, "what is your trouble? I too have suffered, Mr. Grafton!" and the tears stole down her cheeks in sorrow for herself and him.

He only patted the small hand, and she crept to his feet silently, and nestled there, which was more comforting than all the words she could have uttered. There was nothing for George to go home for now, so he gave himself up to work, and grew rapidly rich again. He talked but little to Beryl, but found comfort in her presence. He had told her all the story of his life, and of his wife's sad and sudden death, and she had listened, grieving for his grief, sorrowing for his sorrow, envying the dead woman

in her grave who had been so well loved. But Beryl's love was all unselfish. She gave *all*, expecting nothing in return, and was contented so that she might be with George.

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